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MAGAZINE



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By Will James

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The most fascinating romance published in years—back to the primitive in the heart of Africa. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Box L Mystery By Robert Ames Bennet 100
A novel which combines the attractions of a detective story and a cowboy story all in one—by the author of "Go-Getter Gary." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

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Captain Cormorant Proposes By Bertram Atkey 81
The author of the famous "Easy Street Experts" here introduces to you another sweet specimen whose exploits are amusing indeed. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

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A sharply cut little fiction cameo—a vivid drama by the man who wrote “The Last Stampede.”

The Inside Job By Calvin Ball 92
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On Location By Clarence Herbert New 127
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Just Careful By Louis Clair Miller 194
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Something New

A MAGAZINE should come to its readers like a bride to her husband, with "something old and something new," and all the rest of it. This month, although old friends are not wanting, we have rather stressed the "something new" element.

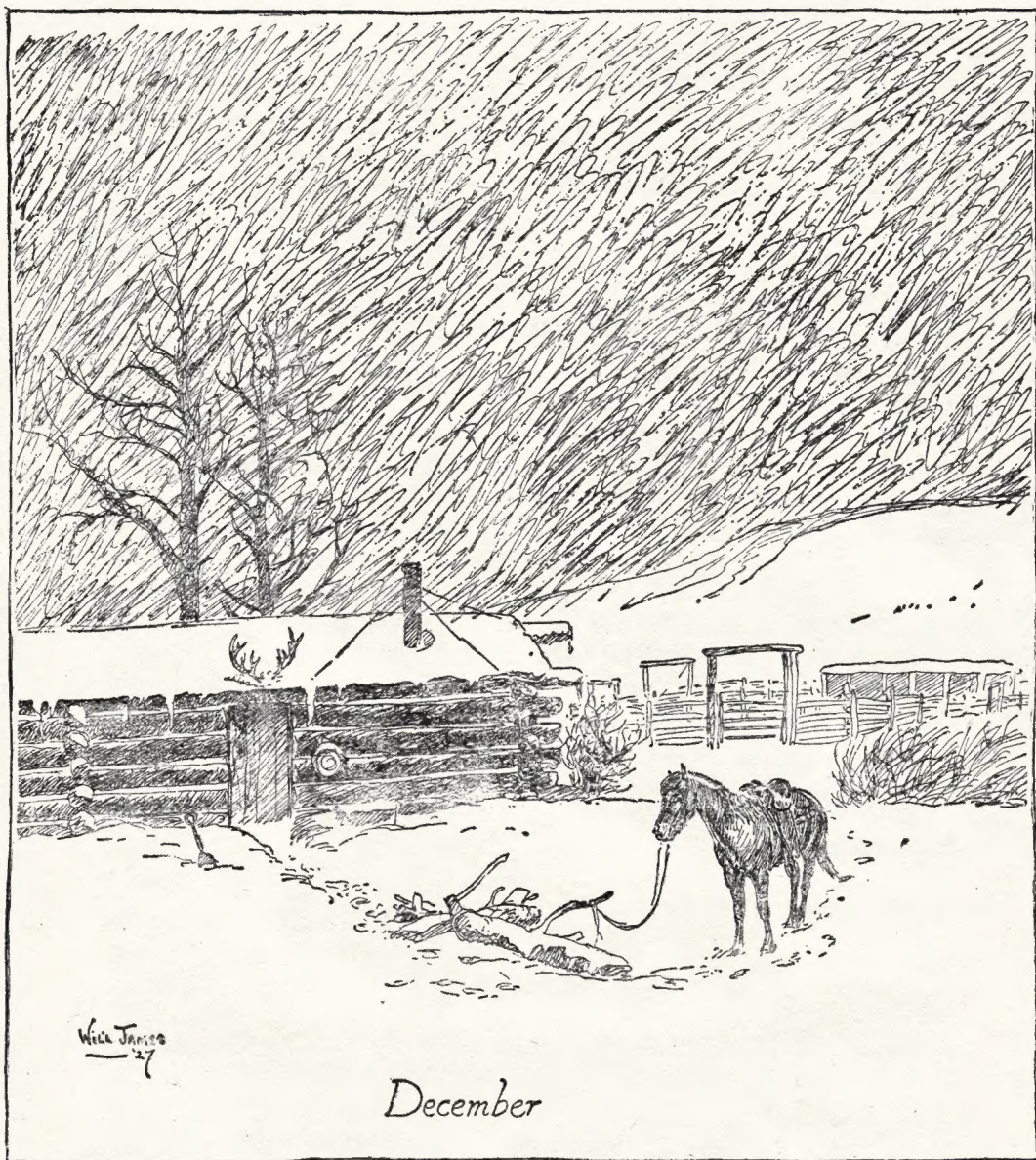
First and foremost comes "Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle," the most captivating example of the romantic novel published in years. Simply by turning this page to Edgar Rice Burroughs' unique story, you may embark on a far and fascinating adventure in the heart of Africa—may enjoy all the wild triumph that thrilled primeval man when he ranged victor through the wilderness of this world's dawn.

Next comes the first of a new and timely group by H. Bedford-Jones, a series of detective stories based on the convention of the American Legion in Paris. Written on the spot, these full-of-action tales picture present-day Paris accurately; more, they are fine examples of detective fiction at its best—the exploits of an American in league with the Paris police against the clever and daring French crooks who hope for rich and easy prey in the visiting Americans. You will find "Ten Years After" and the stories to follow of exceptional interest.

Another new series that brings back an old friend is "Captain Cormorant Proposes," the first of a conspicuously amusing group by Bertram Atkey, who so long and well entertained you with his blithe rapsallions the Honorable John Brass and Colonel Clumber in "The Easy Street Experts." Like these and sundry other well-loved literary villains from Gil Blas to Raffles, Captain Cormorant by his own showing deserves to be hanged, at the least; but somehow or other his blandly confessed crimes rather endear him to anyone not incorrigibly serious-minded, and we think you'll get many a chuckle from the old sinner.

These—"Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle," the tales about Captain Cormorant and Bedford-Jones' Legion adventures—will continue next month, along with the well-tried favorites like Clarence Herbert New, Robert Ames Bennet, Lemuel De Bra, Culpeper Zandt and Calvin Ball, who also help to make the present issue attractive. Indeed with these, the Western stories, the five unusually memorable stories of Real Experience and the many other items of varied but constant interest—well, why spend further time with this our tedious introduction?

—*The Editors.*



December

“The Winter’s Camp”

The Cowboy’s Calendar—by Will James

BY the cottonwood-timbered creeks of the cow-country are scattered one- or two-roomed cabins which make up the cow-camps of every outfit. The riders that stay with the outfit the year around are paired off to each camp where they’re to ride through the winter and keep an eye on whatever stock which will need feeding; one or two “hay-shovelers” (ranch hands) are there to feed whatever stock the riders bring in. Sometimes there’s a cook to help along in such

camps, and as the winter sets in and the coulees fill up with drifts, the work accumulates till all hands are kept mighty busy. And the work goes on the same if the sun is shining or a blizzard is howling. Christmas comes as just another day, and as the year dies out and the town folks are celebrating the coming of the new year, the rider is apt to be in some draw figgering ways to get around snowbanks with some little bunch of weak stock he’s bringing in to camp.

TARZAN,

Lord of the Jungle

By

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

"Tarzan" is the tremendous romantic success of recent years. Millions and millions of readers in America and abroad have followed the Man of the Apes. Here is Tarzan today in a great, new adventure.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

CHAPTER I

TANTOR THE ELEPHANT

HIS great bulk swaying to and fro as he threw his weight first upon one side and then upon the other, Tantor the elephant lolled in the shade of the father of forests. Almost omnipotent, he, in the realm of his people. Dango, Sheeta, even Numa the mighty, were as naught to the pachyderm. For a hundred years he had come and gone up and down the land that had trembled to the comings and the goings of his forbears for countless ages.

In peace Tantor had lived with Dango the hyena, Sheeta the leopard and Numa the lion. Man alone had made war upon him, man, who holds the unique distinction among created things of making war on all created things, even to his own kind. Man the ruthless; man the pitiless; man, the most hated living organism Nature has evolved.

Always, during the long hundred years of his life, Tantor had known man. There had been black men, always. Big black warriors with spears and arrows, little black warriors, swart Arabs with crude muskets, and white men with powerful express rifles and elephant guns. The white men had been the last to come, and were the worst. Yet Tantor did not hate men—not even

white men. Hate, vengeance, envy, avarice are a few of the delightful emotions reserved exclusively for Nature's noblest work; the *lower* animals do not know them. Neither do they know fear as man knows it, but rather a certain bold caution that sends the antelope and the zebra, watchful and wary, to the water-hole with the lion.

Tantor shared this caution with his fellows and avoided men—especially white men; and so had there been other eyes there that day to see, their possessor might almost have questioned their veracity, or attributed their error to the half-light of the forest as they scanned the figure sprawling flat upon the rough back of the elephant, half dozing in the heat to the swaying of the great body; for despite the sun-bronzed hide, the figure was quite evidently that of a white man. But there were no other eyes to see, and Tantor drowsed in the heat of midday; and Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle, dozed upon the back of his mighty friend. A sultry air-current moved sluggishly from the north, bringing to the keen nostrils of the ape-man no disquieting perception. Peace lay upon the jungle, and the two beasts were content.

In the forest Fahd and Motlog, of the tribe el-Harb, hunted north from the *menzil* of Sheik Ibn Jad of the Beny Sâlem fendy el-Guâd. With them were black slaves. They advanced warily and in silence upon the fresh spoor of the elephant, the thoughts of the swart 'Aarab dwelling upon ivory, those of the black slaves upon fresh meat. The black Galla slave Fejuân, sleek, ebon warrior, eater of raw meat, famed hunter, led the others. Fejuân, like his comrades, thought of fresh meat, but also he thought of el-Hâbash, the land from which he had been stolen as a boy. He thought of coming again to the lonely Galla hut of his parents. Perhaps el-Hâbash was not far off now. For months Ibn Jad had been traveling south, and now he had come east for a long distance. El-Hâbash must be near. When he was sure of that, his days of slavery would be over and Ibn Jad would have lost his best Galla slave.

Two marches to the north, in the southern extremity of Abyssinia, stood the round dwelling of the father of Fejuân, almost on the roughly mapped route that Ibn Jad had planned nearly a year since when he had undertaken this mad adventure upon the advice of a learned *sâhar*, a magician of repute. But of either the exact location of his father's house or the exact plans of Ibn Jad Fejuân was equally ignorant; he but dreamed.

IN the heat above the heads of the hunters the leaves of the forest drowsed. Beneath the drowsing leaves of other trees a stone's throw ahead of them Tarzan and Tantor drowsed, their perceptive faculties momentarily dulled by the soothing influence of fancied security and the somnolence that is a corollary of equatorial midday.

Fejuân, the Galla slave, halted in his tracks, stopping those behind him by the silent mandate of an upraised hand. Directly before him, seen dimly between the boles and through the foliage, swayed the giant bulk of *el-fil*. Fejuân motioned to Fahd, who moved stealthily to the side of the black, and the Galla slave pointed through the foliage toward a patch of gray hide. Fahd raised el-Lazzâry, his ancient matchlock, to his shoulder. There was a flash of flame, a burst of smoke, a roar; and *el-fil*, unhit, was bolting through the forest.

As Tantor surged forward at the sound

of the report, Tarzan started to spring to an upright position, and at the same instant the pachyderm passed beneath a low hanging limb which struck the ape-man squarely across the side of his head, sweeping him to the ground, where he lay stunned and unconscious.

TERRIFIED, Tantor thought only of escape as he ran north through the forest, leaving in his wake felled trees, trampled or upturned bushes. Perhaps he did not know that his friend lay helpless and injured, at the mercy of the common enemy man. Tantor never thought of Tarzan as one of the *tarmangani*, for the white man was synonymous with discomfort, pain, annoyance, whereas Tarzan of the Apes meant to him restful companionship, peace, happiness. Of all the jungle beasts except his own kind he fraternized with Tarzan only.

"*Billah!* Thou missed," exclaimed Fejuân.

"*Gluck!*" ejaculated Fahd. "Sheytân guided the bullet. But let us see—perhaps *el-fil* is hit."

"Nay, thou missed."

The two men pushed forward, followed by their fellows, looking for the hoped-for carmine spoor. Fahd was in the lead now. Suddenly he stopped.

"*Wellah!* What have we here?" he cried. "I fired at *el-fil* and killed a Nas-râny."

The others crowded about. "It is indeed a Christian dog, and naked, too," said Motlog.

"Or some wild man of the forest," suggested another. "Where didst thy bullet strike him, Fahd?"

They stooped and rolled Tarzan over. "There is no mark of bullet upon him."

"Is he dead? Perhaps he too hunted *el-fil* and was slain by the great beast."

"He is not dead," announced Fejuân, who had kneeled and placed an ear above the ape-man's heart. "He lives, and from the mark upon his head, I think but temporarily out of his wits from a blow. See, he lies in the path that *el-fil* made when he ran away—he was struck down in the brute's flight."

"I will finish him," said Fahd, drawing his *khûsa*.

"By Ullah, no! Put back thy knife, Fahd," said Motlog. "Let the sheik say if he shall be killed. Thou art always too eager to let the blood of another."

"It is but a Nasrâny," insisted Fahd. "Think thou to carry him back to the *menzil*?"

"He moves," said Fejjuân. "Presently he will be able to walk there without help. But perhaps he will not come with us and look, he hath the size and muscles of a giant. What a man!"

"Bind him," then commanded Fahd, and with thongs of camel hide they made the ape-man's two wrists secure together across his belly; nor was the work com-

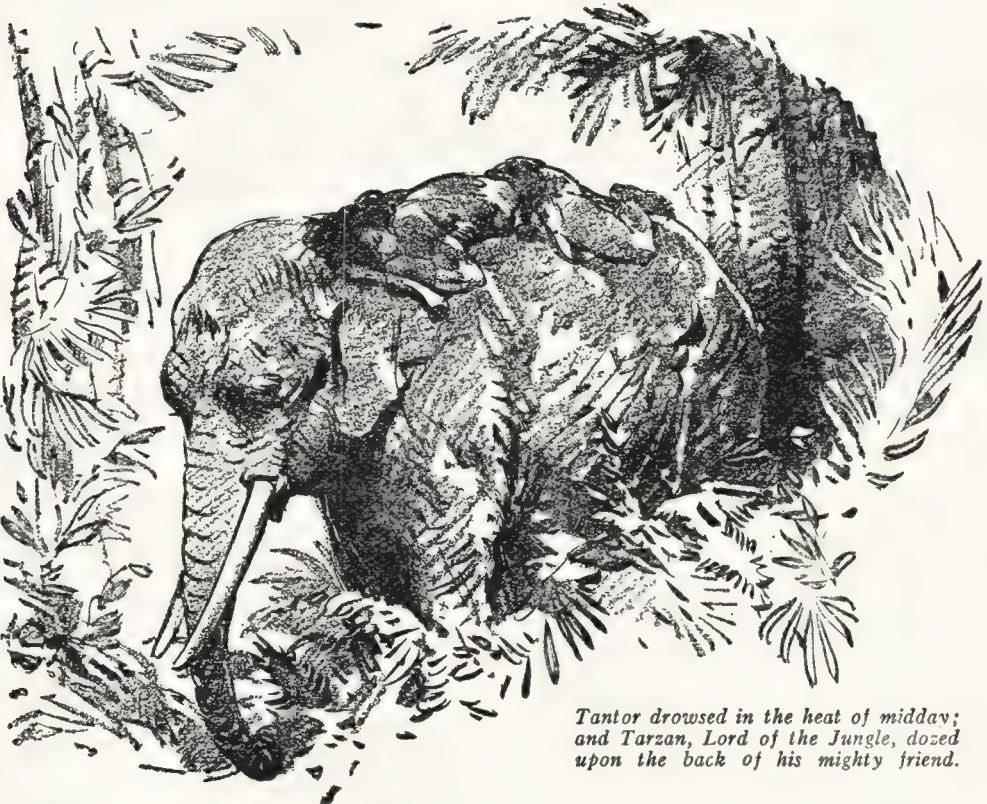
pleted any too soon. They had scarce done when Tarzan opened his eyes and looked them slowly over.

that we have entered in the past two weeks we have heard his name. 'Wait,' they have said, 'until Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle, returns. He will slay you when he learns that you have taken slaves in his country'."

"When I drew my *khûsa*, thou shouldst not have stopped my hand, Motlog," complained Fahd; "but it is not too late yet."

He placed his hand upon the hilt of his knife.

"Nay!" cried Motlog. "We have taken



Tantor drowsed in the heat of midday; and Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle, dozed upon the back of his mighty friend.

pleted any too soon. They had scarce done when Tarzan opened his eyes and looked them slowly over.

"Why are my wrists bound?" he asked them in their own tongue. "Remove the thongs!"

Fahd laughed. "Thinkest thou, Nasrâny, that thou art some great sheik, that thou canst order about the Beduw as they were dogs?"

"I am Tarzan," replied the ape-man, as one might say, "I am the sheik of sheiks."

"Tarzan!" exclaimed Motlog. He drew Fahd aside. "Of all men," he said, lowering his voice, "that it should be our ill fortune to offend this one! In every village

slaves in this country. They are with us now and some of them will escape. That you know as well as I. Suppose they carry word to the *fendy* of this great sheik that we have slain him? Not one of us will live to return to Béled el-Guâd."

"Let us then take him before Ibn Jad that the responsibility may be his," said Fahd.

"You speak wisely," replied Motlog. "What the sheik doeth with this man is the sheik's business. Come!"

AS they returned to where Tarzan stood he eyed them questioningly.

"What have you decided to do with

me?" he demanded. "If you are wise, you will cut these bonds and lead me to your sheik. I wish a word with him."

"We are only poor men," said Motlog. "It is not for us to say what shall be done, and so we shall take you to our sheik, who will decide."

The Sheik Ibn Jad of the fendy el-Guâd squatted in the open men's compartment of his *beyt es-sh'ar*, and beside him in the *mukaad* of his house of hair sat Tollog, his brother, and a young Beduin, Zeyd, who, doubtless, found less attraction in the company of the sheik than in the proximity of the sheik's hareem, whose quarters were separated from the *mukaad* only by a breast-high curtain suspended between the waist-poles of the *beyt*, affording thus an occasional glimpse of Ateja, the daughter of Ibn Jad. That it also afforded an occasional glimpse of Hirfa, his wife, raised not the temperature of Zeyd an iota.

As the men talked the two women were busy within their apartment at their housewifely duties. In a great brazen *jidda* Hirfa was placing mutton to be boiled for the next meal, while Ateja fashioned sandals from an old bag of camel leather impregnated with the juice of the dates that it had borne upon many a *râhla*; and meanwhile they missed naught of the conversation that passed in the *mukaad*.

"We have come a long way without mishap from our own *béled*," Ibn Jad was remarking, "and the way has been longer because I wished not to pass through el-Hâbash lest we be set upon or followed by the people of that country. Now may we turn north again and enter el-Hâbash close to the spot where the magician foretold we should find the treasure city of Nîmmr."

"And thinkest thou to find this fabled city easily, once we are within the boundaries of el-Hâbash?" asked Tollog, his brother.

"Wellah, yes! It is known to the people of this far south Hâbash. Fejjuân, himself an Hâbashy, though he has never been there, heard of it as a boy. We shall take prisoners among them, and by the grace of Allah, we shall find the means to loose their tongues and have the truth from them."

"By Ullah, I hope it does not prove like the treasure that lies upon the great rock el-Howwâra in the plain of Medâin Sâlih," said Zeyd. "An afrit guards it where it

lies sealed in a stone tower, and they say that should it be removed, disaster would befall mankind, for men would turn upon their friends, and even upon their brothers, the sons of their fathers and mothers, and the kings of the world would give battle, one against another."

"Yea," testified Tollog, "I had it from one of the fendy Hâzim that a wise Mógheby came by there in his travels and consulting the cabalistic signs in his book of magic discovered that indeed the treasure lay there."

"But none dared take it up," said Zeyd. "Billah!" exclaimed Ibn Jad. "There be no afrit guarding the treasures of Nîmmr. Naught but flesh and blood Hâbûsh that may easily be laid low. The treasure is ours for the taking."

"Ullah grant that it may be as easily found as the treasure of Geryeh," said Zeyd, "which lies a journey north of Tebûk in the ancient ruins of a walled city. There, each Friday, the pieces of money roll out of the ground and run about over the desert until sunset."

"Once we are come to Nîmmr, there will be no difficulty finding the treasure," Ibn Jad assured them. "The difficulty will lie in getting out of el-Hâbash with the treasure and the woman, and if she is as beautiful as the *sâhar* said, the men of Nîmmr may protect her even more savagely than they would the treasure."

"Often do magicians lie," said Tollog.

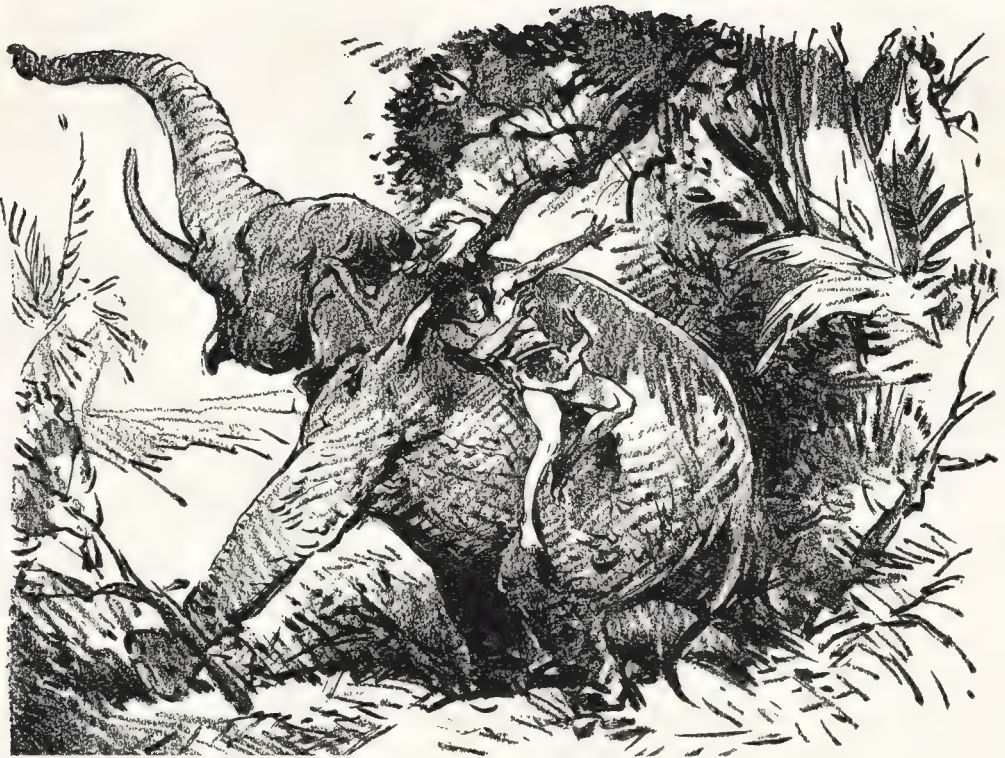
"WHO comes?" exclaimed Ibn Jad, looking toward the jungle that hemmed the *menzil* upon all sides.

"Billah! 'Tis Fahd and Motlog returning from the hunt," said Tollog. "Ullah grant that they bring ivory and meat."

"They return too soon," said Zeyd.

"But they do not come empty-handed!" And Ibn Jad pointed toward the naked giant accompanying the returning hunters. The group surrounding Tarzan approached the sheik's *beyt* and halted. Wrapped in his soiled calico *thôb*, his headkerchief drawn across the lower part of his face, Ibn Jad exposed but two villainous eyes to the intent scrutiny of the ape-man which simultaneously included the pock-marked, shifty-eyed visage of Tollog, the sheik's brother, and the not ill-favored countenance of the youthful Zeyd.

"Who is sheik here?" demanded Tarzan in tones of authority that belied the camel leather thongs about his wrists.



The pachyderm passed beneath a low-hanging limb which swept the ape-man to the ground, where he lay stunned and unconscious.

Ibn Jad permitted his *thorrib* to fall from before his face. "Wellah, I am sheik," he said. "And by what name art thou known, Nasrâny?"

"They call me Tarzan of the Apes, Moslem."

"Tarzan of the Apes," mused Ibn Jad. "I have heard the name."

"Doubtless. It is not unknown to 'Arab slave-raiders. Why, then, came you to my country, knowing I permit not my people to be taken into slavery?"

"We do not come for slaves," Ibn Jad assured him. "We do but trade in peace for ivory."

"Thou liest in thy beard, Moslem," returned Tarzan quietly. "I recognize both Manyuema and Galla slaves in thy *menzil*, and I know that they are not here of their own choosing. Then too, was I not present when your henchmen fired a shot at *el-fil*? Is that peaceful trading for ivory? No! It is poaching, and that Tarzan of the Apes does not permit in his country. You are raiders and poachers."

"By Ullah, we are honest men," cried Ibn Jad. "Fahd and Motlog did but hunt for meat. If they shot *el-fil*, it must be that they mistook him for another beast."

"Enough!" cried Tarzan. "Remove the thongs that bind me and prepare to return

north whence thou came. Thou shalt have an escort and bearers to the Soudan."

"We have come a long way and wish only to trade in peace," insisted Ibn Jad. "We shall pay our bearers for their labor and take no slaves, nor shall we again fire upon *el-fil*. Let us go our way, and when we return we will pay you well for permission to pass through your country."

Tarzan shook his head. "No! you shall go at once. Come, cut these bonds!"

Ibn Jad's eyes narrowed. "We have offered thee peace and profits, Nasrâny," he said, "but if thou wouldst have war, let it be war. Thou art in our power, and remember that dead enemies are harmless. Think it over!" And to Fahd: "Take him away and bind his feet also."

"Be careful, Moslem," warned Tarzan. "The arms of the ape-man are long—they may reach out even in death and their fingers encircle your throat."

"Thou shalt have until dark to decide, Nasrâny, and thou mayest know that Ibn Jad will not turn back until he hath that for which he came."

THEY took Tarzan then and at a distance from the *beyt* of Ibn Jad they pushed him into a small *héjra*; but once within this tent it required three men to

throw him to the ground and bind his ankles, even though his wrists were already bound.

In the *beyt* of the sheik the Beduins sipped their coffee, sickish with clove, cinnamon and other spice, the while they discussed the ill fortune that had befallen them, for, regardless of his bravado, Ibn Jad knew full well that only speed and most propitious circumstance could now place the seal of success upon his venture.

"But for Motlog," said Fahd, "we would now have no cause for worry concerning the Nasrâny, for I had my knife ready to slit the dog's throat when Motlog interfered."

"And had word of his slaying spread broadcast over his country before another sunset and all his people at our heels," countered Motlog.

"*Wellah!*" said Tollog, the sheik's brother. "I wish Fahd had done the thing he wished. After all, how much better off are we if we permit the Nasrâny to live? Should we free him we know that he will gather his people and drive us from the country. If we keep him prisoner and an escaped slave carries word of it to his people, will they not be upon us even more surely than as though we had slain him?"

"Tollog, thou speakest words of wisdom," said Ibn Jad, nodding appreciatively.

"But wait," said Tollog, "I have within me, unspoken, words of an even greater worth." He leaned forward, motioning the others closer and lowered his voice. "Should this one whom they call Tarzan of the Apes escape during the night, or should we set him free, there would be no bad word for an escaped slave to bear to his people."

"*Billah!*" exclaimed Fahd disgustedly. "There would be no need for an escaped slave to bring word to his people—the Nasrâny himself would do that and lead them upon us in person. Bah! the brains of Tollog are naught!"

"Thou hast not heard all that I would say, brother," continued Tollog, ignoring Fahd. "It would only *seem* to the slaves that this man had escaped, for in the morning he would be gone and we would make great lamentation over the matter, or we would say: '*Wellah*, it is true that Ibn Jad made peace with the stranger, who departed into the jungle blessing him.'"

"I do not follow thee, brother," said Ibn Jad.

"The Nasrâny lies bound in yonder *héjra*. The night will be dark. A slim knife between his ribs were enough. There be faithful Habush among us who will do our bidding, nor speak of the matter after. They can prepare a trench from the bottom of which a dead Tarzan may not reach out to harm us."

"By Ullah, it is plain that thou art of sheikly blood, Tollog!" exclaimed Ibn Jad. "The wisdom of thy words proclaims it. Thou shalt attend to the whole matter; then will it be done secretly and well."

CHAPTER II

COMRADES OF THE WILD

DARKNESS fell upon the *menzil* of Ibn Jad the sheik. Within the confines of the small tent where his captors had left him, Tarzan still struggled with the bonds that secured his wrists, but the tough camel leather withstood even the might of his giant thews. At times he lay listening to the night noises of the jungle, many of them noises that no other human ear could have heard, and always he interpreted each correctly. He knew when Numa passed and Sheeta the leopard, and then from afar and so faintly that it was but the shadow of a whisper, there came down the wind the trumpeting of a bull elephant.

Without the *beyt* of Ibn Jad, Ateja the sheik's daughter loitered and with her was Zeyd, who held the maiden's hands in his.

"Tell me, Ateja," he said, "that you love no other than Zeyd."

"How many times must I tell you that?" whispered the girl.

"And you do not love Fahd?" insisted the man.

"*Billah*, no!" she ejaculated.

"Yet your father gives the impression that one day you will be Fahd's."

"My father wishes me to be of the hareem of Fahd, but I mistrust the man and I could not belong to one whom I neither loved nor trusted."

"I too mistrust Fahd," said Zeyd. "Listen, Ateja! I doubt his loyalty to thy father, and not his alone, but another whose name I dare not even whisper."

The girl nodded her head. "I know. It is not necessary even to whisper the name to me—and I hate him even as I hate Fahd."

"But he is of thine own kin," the youth reminded her.

"What of that? Is he not also my father's brother? If that bond does not hold him loyal to Ibn Jad, who hath treated him well, why should I pretend loyalty for him? Nay, I think him a traitor to my father, but Ibn Jad seems blind to the fact. We are a long way from our own country, and if aught should befall the sheik, Tollog, being next of blood, would assume the sheikly duties and honors. I think he hath won Fahd's support by a promise to further his suit for me with Ibn Jad, for I have noticed that Tollog exerts himself to praise Fahd in the hearing of my father."

"And perhaps a division of the spoils of the *ghrazzu* upon the treasure city," suggested Zeyd.

"It is not unlikely," replied the girl, "and—*Ullah*, what was that?"

The Beduins seated about the coffee fire leaped to their feet. The black slaves, startled, peered out into the darkness from their rude shelters. Muskets were seized. Silence fell again upon the tense, listening *menzil*. The weird, uncanny cry that had unnerved them was not repeated.

"*Billah!*" ejaculated Ibn Jad. "It came from the midst of the *menzil*, and it was the voice of a beast, where there are only men and a few domestic animals."

"Could it have been—" The speaker stopped as though fearful that the thing he would suggest might indeed be true.

"But he is a man, and that was the voice of a beast," insisted Ibn Jad. "It could not have been he."

"But he is a Nasrâny," reminded Fahd. "Perhaps he has league with Sheytân."

"Come!" said Ibn Jad. "Let us investigate."

With muskets ready, the 'Aarab, lighting the way with lanterns, approached the *héjra* where Tarzan lay bound. Fearfully the foremost looked within.

"He is here," he reported.

Tarzan, who was sitting in the center of the tent, surveyed the 'Aarab somewhat contemptuously.

"You heard a cry?" demanded Ibn Jad of the ape-man.

"Yes, I heard it. Camest thou, Sheik Ibn Jad, to disturb my rest upon so trivial an errand?"

"What manner of cry was it? What did it signify?" asked Ibn Jad.

Tarzan of the Apes smiled grimly. "It

was but the call of a beast to one of his kind," he replied. "Does the noble Bedûwy tremble thus always when he hears the voices of the jungle people?"

"*Gluck!*" growled Ibn Jad. "The Beduw fear naught. We thought the sound came from this *héjra*, and we hastened hither believing some jungle beast had crept within the *menzil* and attacked thee. Tomorrow it is the thought of Ibn Jad to release thee."

"Why not tonight?"

"We could not send thee alone into the jungle at night where *el-adrea* is abroad hunting," protested the sheik.

Tarzan of the Apes smiled again, one of his rare smiles. "Tarzan is more secure in his teeming jungle than are the Beduw in their desert," he replied. "The jungle night has no terrors for Tarzan."

"Tomorrow," snapped the sheik; and then, motioning to his followers, he turned and departed.

TARZAN watched their lanterns bobbing across the camp to the sheik's *beyt*, and then he stretched himself at full length and pressed an ear to the ground.

When the inhabitants of the 'Aarab *menzil* heard the cry of the beast shatter the quiet of the new night, it aroused within their breasts a certain vague unrest, but otherwise it was meaningless to them. Yet there was one far off in the jungle who caught the call faintly and understood—a huge beast, the great gray dread-naught of the jungle, Tantor the elephant. Again he raised his trunk aloft and trumpeted loudly. His little eyes gleamed redly wicked as, a moment later, he swung off through the forest at a rapid trot.

Slowly silence fell upon the *menzil* of Sheik Ibn Jad as the 'Aarab and their slaves sought their sleeping mats. Only the sheik and his brother sat smoking in the sheik's *beyt*—smoking, and whispering in low tones.

"Do not let the slaves see you slay the Nasrâny, Tollog," cautioned Ibn Jad. "Attend to that yourself first in secrecy and in silence; then quietly arouse two of the slaves. Fejjuân would be as good as another, as he has been among us since childhood and is loyal. He will do well for one."

"Abbas is loyal too, and strong," suggested Tollog.

"Yea, let him be the second," agreed Ibn Jad. "But it is well that they do not

know how the Nasrâny came to die. Tell them that you heard a noise in the direction of his *héjra* and that when you had come to learn the nature of it, you found him thus dead."

"You may trust to my discretion, brother," Tollog assured.

"And warn them to secrecy," continued the sheik. "No man but we four must ever know of the death of the Nasrâny, nor of his place of burial. In the morning we shall tell the others that he escaped during the night. Leave his cut bonds within the *héjra* as proof. You understand?"

"By Ullah, fully."

"Good! Now go. The people sleep." The sheik rose, and Tollog also. The former entered the apartment of his hareem, and the latter moved silently through the darkness of the night in the direction of the *héjra* where his victim lay.

THROUGH the jungle came Tantor the elephant, and from his path fled gentle beasts, and fierce. Even Numa the lion slunk growling to one side as the mighty pachyderm passed.

Into the darkness of the *héjra* crept Tollog, the sheik's brother; but Tarzan, lying with an ear to the ground, had heard him approaching from the moment that he had left the *beyt* of Ibn Jad. Tarzan heard other sounds as well, and as he interpreted these others, he interpreted the stealthy approach of Tollog and was convinced when the footsteps turned into the tent where he lay—convinced of the purpose of his visitor. For what purpose but the taking of his life would a Beduin visit Tarzan at this hour of the night?

As Tollog, groping in the dark, entered the tent, Tarzan sat erect, and again there smote upon the ears of the Beduin the horrid cry that had disturbed the *menzil* earlier in the evening; this time it arose in the very *héjra* in which Tollog stood.

The Beduin halted, aghast. "*Ullah!*" he cried, stepping back. "What beast is here? Nasrâny! Art thou being attacked?"

Others in the camp were awakened, but none ventured forth to investigate. Tarzan smiled and remained silent.

"Nasrâny!" repeated Tollog, but there was no reply.

Cautiously, his knife ready in his hand, the Beduin backed from the *héjra*. He listened, but heard no sound from within.

Running quickly to his own *beyt*, he made a light in a lantern and hastened back to the *héjra*; and this time he carried his musket, and it was at full cock. Peering within, the lantern held above his head, Tollog saw the ape-man sitting upon the ground looking at him. There was no wild beast! Then the truth flashed into the mind of the Beduin.

"*Billah!* It wast thou, Nasrâny, who made the fearful cries."

"Bedüwy, thou comest to kill the Nasrâny, eh?" demanded Tarzan.

FROM the jungle came the roar of a lion and the trumpeting of a bull elephant, but the boma was high and sharp with thorns, and there were guards and beast fires, and so Tollog gave no thought to these familiar noises of the night. He did not answer Tarzan's question, but laid aside his musket and drew his *khûsa*, which after all was answer enough.

In the dim light of the paper lantern Tarzan watched these preparations. He saw the cruel expression upon the malevolent face. He saw the man approaching slowly, the knife ready in his hand.

The man was almost upon him now, his eyes glittering in the faint light. To the ears of the ape-man came the sound of a commotion at the far edge of the *menzil*, followed by an Arab oath. Then Tollog launched a blow at Tarzan's breast. The prisoner swung his bound wrists upward and struck the Beduin's knife arm away, and simultaneously he struggled to his knees. With an oath, Tollog struck again; and again Tarzan fended the blow; and this time he followed swiftly with a mighty sweep of his arms that struck the Beduin upon the side of the head and sent him sprawling across the *héjra*; but Tollog was instantly up and at him again, this time with the ferocity of a maddened bull, yet at the same time with far greater cunning, for instead of attempting a direct frontal attack, Tollog leaped quickly around Tarzan to strike him from behind.

In his effort to turn upon his knees that he might face his antagonist, the ape-man lost his balance, his feet being bound together, and fell supine at Tollog's mercy. A vicious smile bared the yellow teeth of the Beduin.

"Die, Nasrâny!" he cried; and then, "*Billah!* What was that?" as of a sudden the entire tent was snatched from above his head and hurled off into the night. He

turned quickly, and a shriek of terror burst from his lips as he saw, red-eyed and angry, the giant form of *el-fil* towering above him. And in that very instant a supple trunk encircled his body; and Tollog, the sheik's brother, was raised high aloft and hurled off into the darkness as the tent had been.

For an instant Tantor stood looking about, angrily, defiantly; then he reached down and lifted Tarzan from the ground, raised him high above his head, wheeled

brother, his mouth filled with vile Beduin invective, whereas it should have contained only praises of Allah and Thanksgiving, for Tollog was indeed a most fortunate man. Had he alighted elsewhere than upon the top of a sturdily pegged *beyt*, he had doubtless been killed or badly injured when Tantor hurled him thus rudely aside.

Ibn Jad, searching for information, arrived just as Tollog was extricating himself from the folds of the tent.

"*Billah!*" cried the sheik. "What has



A vicious smile bared the teeth of the Beduin. "Die, Nasrâny!" he cried.

about and trotted rapidly across the *menzil* toward the jungle. A frightened sentry fired once and fled. The other sentry lay crushed and dead where Tantor had hurled him when he entered the camp. An instant later Tarzan and Tantor were swallowed by the jungle and the darkness.

THE *menzil* of Sheik Ibn Jad was in an uproar. Armed men hastened hither and thither seeking the cause of the disturbance, looking for an attacking enemy. Some came to the spot where had stood the *héjra* where the Nasrâny had been confined, but *héjra* and Nasrâny both had disappeared. Near by, the *beyt* of one of Ibn Jad's cronies lay flattened. Beneath it were screaming women and a cursing man. On top of it was Tollog, the sheik's

come to pass? What, O brother, art thou doing upon the *beyt* of Abd el-Aziz?"

A slave came running to the sheik. "The Nasrâny is gone and he hath taken the *héjra* with him," he cried.

Ibn Jad turned to Tollog. "Canst thou not explain, brother?" he demanded. "Is the Nasrâny truly departed?"

"The Nasrâny is indeed gone," replied Tollog. "He is in league with Sheytân, who came in the guise of *el-fil* and carried the Nasrâny into the jungle, after throwing me upon the top of the *beyt* of Abd el-Aziz, whom I still hear squealing and cursing beneath as though it had been he who was attacked rather than I."

Ibn Jad shook his head. Of course he

knew that Tollog was a liar—that he always had known; yet he could not understand how his brother had come to be upon the top of the *beyt* of Abd el-Aziz.

"What did the sentries see?" demanded the sheik. "Where were they?"

"They were at their posts," spoke up Motlog. "I was just there. One of them is dead, the other fired upon the intruder as it escaped."

"And what said he of it?" demanded Ibn Jad.

"Wellah, he said that *el-fil* came and entered the *menzil*, killing Yémeny and rushing to the *héjra* where the Nasrâny lay bound, ripping it aside, throwing Tollog high into the air. Then he seized the prisoner and bore him off into the jungle, and as he passed him Hâsan fired."

"And missed," guessed Ibn Jad.

For several moments the sheik stood in thought; then he turned slowly toward his own *beyt*. "Tomorrow, early, is the *râhla*," he said, and the word spread quickly that early upon the morrow they would break camp.

FAR into the forest Tantor bore Tarzan until they had come to a small clearing well carpeted with grass, and here the elephant deposited his burden gently upon the ground and stood guard above.

"In the morning," said Tarzan, "when Kudu the Sun hunts again through the heavens and there is light by which to see, we shall discover what may be done about removing these bonds, Tantor, but for now let us sleep."

Numa the lion, Dango the hyena, Sheeta the leopard passed near that night, and the scent of the helpless man-thing was strong in their nostrils; but when they saw who stood guard above Tarzan and heard the mutterings of the big bull, they passed on about their business while Tarzan of the Apes slept.

With the coming of dawn all was quickly astir in the *menzil* of Ibn Jad. Scarce was the meager breakfast eaten ere the *beyt* of the sheik was taken down by his women, and at this signal the other houses of hair came tumbling to the ground; and within the hour the 'Aarab were winding northward toward el-Hâbash.

The Beduins and their women were mounted upon the desert ponies that had survived the long journey from the north, while the slaves that they had brought with them from their own country marched

afoot at the front and rear of the column in the capacity of askari, and these were armed with muskets. Their bearers were the natives that they had impressed into their service along the way. These carried the impedimenta of the camp and herded the goats and sheep along the trail.

Zeyd rode beside Ateja, the daughter of the sheik, and more often were his eyes upon her profile than upon the trail ahead. Fahd, who rode near Ibn Jad, cast an occasional angry glance in the direction of the two. Tollog, the sheik's brother, saw and grinned.

"Zeyd is a bolder suitor than thou, Fahd," he whispered to the young man.

"He has whispered lies into her ears, and she will have none of me," complained Fahd.

"If I were sheik, now," suggested Tollog, "but alas, I am not."

"If you were sheik, what then?"

"My niece would go to the man of my own choosing."

"But you are not sheik," Fahd reminded him.

Tollog leaned close and whispered in Fahd's ear. "A suitor as bold as Zeyd would find the way to make me sheik."

Fahd made no reply, but only rode on in silence, his head bowed and his brows contracted in thought.

CHAPTER III

THE APES OF TOYAT

THREE days crawled slowly out of the east and followed one another across the steaming jungle and over the edge of the world beyond. For three days the 'Aarab moved slowly northward toward el-Hâbash. For three days Tarzan of the Apes lay in the little clearing, bound and helpless, while Tantor the elephant stood guard above him. Once each day the great bull brought the ape-man food and water.

The camel-leather thongs held securely, and no outside aid appeared to release Tarzan from the ever-increasing discomfort and danger of his predicament. He had called to Manu the monkey to come and gnaw the strands apart, but Manu, ever irresponsible, had only promised and forgotten. And so the ape-man lay uncomplaining, as is the way of beasts, patiently waiting for release, knowing that it might come in the habiliment of death.

Upon the morning of the fourth day Tantor gave evidences of restlessness. His brief foragings had exhausted the near-by supply of food for himself and his charge. He wanted to move on and take Tarzan with him, but the ape-man was now convinced that to be carried further into the elephant country would lessen his chances for succor, for he felt that the only one of the jungle people who could release him was Mangani the great ape. Already Tarzan knew that he was practically at the outer limits of the Mangani country; yet there was a remote chance that a band of the great anthropoids might pass this way and discover him, while, should Tantor carry him further north, even this meager likelihood of release would be gone forever.

Tantor wanted to be gone. He nudged Tarzan with his trunk and rolled him over. He raised him from the ground.

"Put me down, Tantor," said the ape-man, and the pachyderm obeyed, but he turned and walked away. Tarzan watched him cross the clearing to the trees upon the far side. There Tantor hesitated, stopped, turned. He looked back at Tarzan and trumpeted. He dug up the earth with a great tusk and appeared angry.

"Go and feed," said Tarzan, "then return. Tomorrow the Mangani may come."

Tantor trumpeted again, and wheeling about, disappeared in the jungle.

For a long time the ape-man lay listening to the retreating footfalls of his old friend. "He is gone," he mused. "I cannot blame him. Perhaps it is as well. What matter whether it be today, tomorrow or the day after?"

The morning passed. The noonday silence lay upon the jungle. Only the insects were abroad. They annoyed Tarzan as they did the other jungle beasts, but to the poison of their stings he was immune through a lifetime of inoculation.

Suddenly there came a great scampering through the trees. Little Manu and his brothers, his sisters and his cousins came trooping madly through the middle terrace, squealing, chattering and scolding.

"Manu!" called Tarzan; "what comes?"

"The Mangani! The Mangani!" loudly shrieked the monkeys.

"Go and fetch them, Manu!" commanded the ape-man.

"We are afraid."

"Go and call to them from the upper terraces," urged Tarzan. "They cannot

reach you there. Tell them that one of their people lies helpless here. Tell them to come and release me."

"They cannot climb to the upper terraces," said an old monkey. "I will go."

The others, halted in their flight, turned and watched the gray-beard as he scampered off among the loftiest branches of the great trees, and Tarzan waited.

PRESENTLY he heard the deep gutturals of his own people, the great apes, the Mangani. Perhaps there would be those among them who knew him. Perhaps, again, the band might have come from afar, having no knowledge of him, though that he doubted. In them, however, lay his only hope. He lay there, listening, waiting. He heard Manu screaming and chattering as he scampered about high above the Mangani; then, of a sudden, silence fell upon the jungle.

The ape-man lay quietly looking in the direction from which had come the sounds of the approaching anthropoids. He knew what was transpiring behind that dense wall of foliage. He knew that presently a pair of fierce eyes would be examining him, surveying the clearing, searching for an enemy, warily probing for a trick or a trap.

There lay great danger in the possibility that, seeing him, they might quietly withdraw without showing themselves. That, then, would be the end, for there were no others than the Mangani to whom he might look for rescue. Therefore he spoke.

"I am a friend," he called to them. "The Tarmangani caught me and bound my wrists and ankles. I cannot move. I cannot defend myself. I cannot get food nor water. Come and remove my bonds."

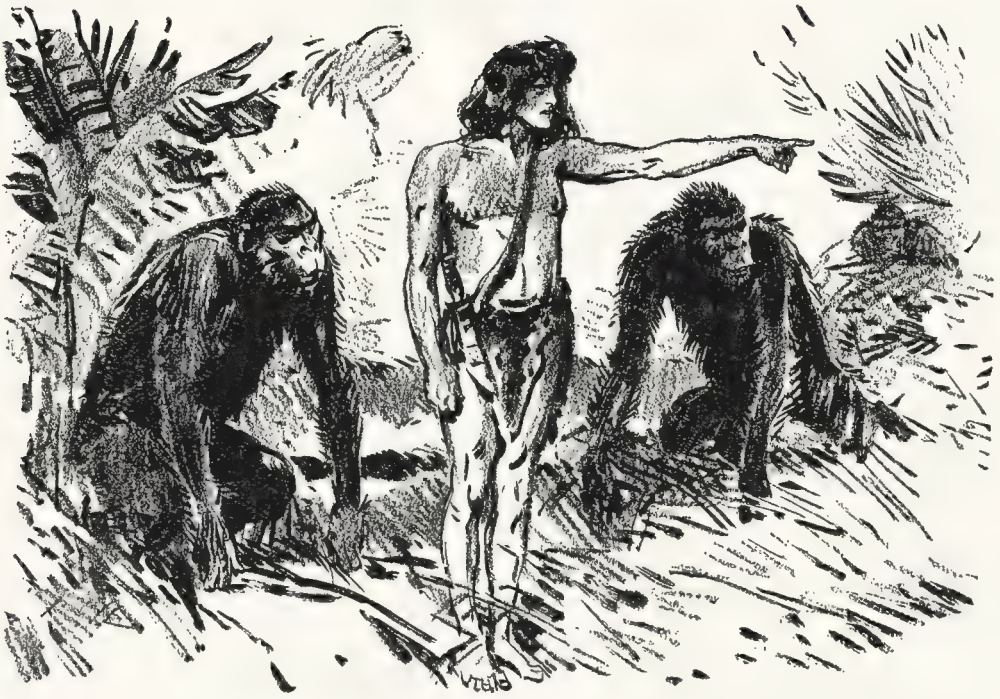
From just behind the screen of foliage a voice replied. "You are a Tarmangani."

"I am Tarzan of the Apes," replied the ape-man.

"Yes," screamed Manu, "he is Tarzan of the Apes! The Tarmangani and the Gomangani bound him thus, and Tantor brought him here. Four times has Kudu hunted across the sky while Tarzan of the Apes lay bound."

"I know Tarzan," said another voice from behind the foliage, and presently the leaves parted, and a huge shaggy ape lumbered into the clearing. Swinging along with knuckles to the ground, the brute came close to Tarzan.

"M'walat!" exclaimed the ape-man.



"Do not tell them that it is really I," then added Tarzan, "until you have cut these bonds. Toyat your king hates me. He will kill me if I am defenseless."

"Yes," agreed M'walat.

"Here," said Tarzan, raising his bound wrists. "Bite these bonds in two."

"You are Tarzan of the Apes, the friend of M'walat. M'walat will do as you ask," replied the ape.

OF course, in the meager language of the apes, their conversation did not sound at all like a conversation between men, but was rather a mixture of growls and grunts and gestures, which, however, served every purpose.

As the other members of the band pressed forward into the clearing, seeing that M'walat was not harmed, the latter stooped and with powerful teeth severed the camel-leather thongs that secured the wrists of the ape-man, and similarly he freed his ankles.

As Tarzan came to his feet, the balance of the fierce and shaggy band swung into the clearing. In the lead was Toyat, king ape, and at his heels eight more full-grown males with perhaps six or seven females and a number of young. The young and the shes hung back, but the bulls pressed forward to where Tarzan stood with M'walat at his side.

The king ape growled menacingly.

"Tarmangani!" he cried. Wheeling in a circle, he leaped into the air and came down on all fours; he struck the ground savagely with his clenched fists; he growled and foamed, and leaped again and again. Toyat was working himself to a pitch of rage that would nerve him to attack the Tarmangani, and by these maneuvers he hoped also to arouse the savage fighting spirit of his fellows.

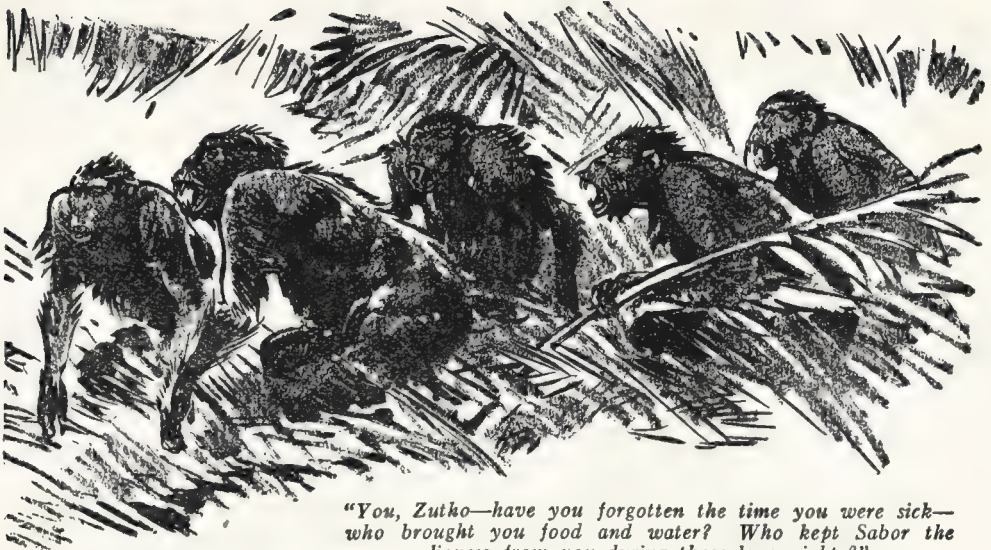
"It is Tarzan of the Apes, friend of the Mangani," said M'walat.

"It is a Tarmangani, enemy of the Mangani," cried Toyat. "They come with great thunder-sticks and kill us. They make our shes and our *balus* dead with a loud noise. Kill the Tarmangani!"

"It is Tarzan of the Apes," growled Gayat. "When I was a little *balu*, he saved me from Numa. Tarzan of the Apes is the friend of the Mangani."

"Kill the Tarmangani!" shrieked Toyat, leaping high into the air.

Several of the other bulls also were now circling and leaping into the air as Gayat placed himself at Tarzan's side. The ape-man knew them well. He knew that sooner or later one of them would have excited himself to such a pitch of maniacal frenzy that he would leap suddenly upon him. M'walat and Gayat would attack in his defense; several more bulls would launch themselves into the battle, and there would ensue a free-for-



"You, Zutho—have you forgotten the time you were sick—who brought you food and water? Who kept Sabor the lioness from you during those long nights?"

all fight. Tarzan of the Apes did not wish to battle with his friends.

"Stop!" he commanded, raising his opened palm to attract attention. "I am Tarzan of the Apes, mighty hunter, mighty fighter; long did I range with the tribe of Kerchak; when Kerchak died, I became king ape; many of you know me; all know that I am first a Mangani; that I am friend to all Mangani. Toyat would have you kill me because Toyat hates Tarzan of the Apes. He hates him not because he is a Tarmangani, but because Tarzan once kept Toyat from becoming king. That was many rains ago when some of you were still *balus*. If Toyat has been a good king, Tarzan is glad, but now he is not acting like a good king, for he is trying to turn you against your best friend.

"You, Zutho!" he exclaimed, suddenly pointing a finger at a huge bull. "You leap and growl and foam at the mouth. You would sink your fangs into the flesh of Tarzan. Have you forgotten, Zutho, the time that you were sick and the other members of the tribe left you to die? Have you forgotten who brought you food and water? Have you forgotten who it was that kept Sabor the lioness and Sheeta the leopard and Dango the hyena from you during those long nights?"

AS Tarzan spoke, his tone one of quiet authority, the apes gradually paused to listen to his words. It was a long speech for the jungle folk. The great apes nor the little monkeys long concentrate

upon one idea. Already, before he had finished, one of the bulls was overturning a rotted log in search of succulent insects. Zutho was wrinkling his brows in unaccustomed recollection. Presently he spoke.

"Zutho remembers," he said. "He is the friend of Tarzan." He ranged himself beside M'walat. And with this the other bulls, except Toyat, appeared to lose interest in the proceedings and either wandered off in search of food or squatted down in the grass.

Toyat still fumed, but as he saw his cause deserted, he prosecuted his war-dance at a safer distance from Tarzan and his defenders, and it was not long before he too was attracted by the more profitable business of bug-hunting.

And so Tarzan ranged again with the great apes, and as he loafed lazily through the forest with the shaggy brutes, he thought of his foster-mother, Kala the great she-ape, the only mother he had ever known; he recalled with a thrill of pride her savage defense of him against all their natural enemies of the jungle and against the hate and jealousy of old Tublat, her mate, and against the enmity of Kerchak the terrible old king ape.

As it had been but yesterday since he had seen him, Tarzan's memory projected again upon the screen of recollection the huge bulk and the ferocious features of old Kerchak. What a magnificent beast he had been! To the childish mind of the ape-boy, Kerchak had been the personification of savage ferocity and authority, and even today Tarzan recalled him al-

most with a sensation of awe. That he had overthrown and slain this gigantic ruler still seemed to Tarzan almost incredible.

He fought again his battles with Terkoz, and with Bolgani the gorilla. He thought of Teeka, whom he had loved, and of Thaka and Tana, and of the little black boy Tibo, whom he had endeavored to adopt, and so he dreamed through lazy daylight hours while Ibn Jad crept slowly northward toward the leopard city of Nimmr, and in another part of the jungle events were transpiring that were to entangle Tarzan in the meshes of adventure.

CHAPTER IV

BOLGANI THE GORILLA

A BLACK porter caught his foot in an entangling creeper and stumbled, throwing his load to the ground. Of such trivialities are crises born. This one altered the entire life of James Hunter Blake, rich, young American, hunting big game for the first time in Africa with his friend Wilbur Stimbol, who, having spent three weeks in the jungle two years before, was naturally the leader of the expedition and an infallible authority on all matters pertaining to big game, African jungle, safari, food, weather and negroes. The further fact that Stimbol was some years Blake's senior naturally but augmented his claims to omniscience.

These factors did not in themselves constitute the basis for the growing differences between the two men, for Blake was a phlegmatically inclined young man of twenty-five who was rather amused by Stimbol's egotism than otherwise. The first rift had occurred back at the railhead, when, through Stimbol's ill temper and domineering manner, the entire purpose of the expedition had been abandoned by necessity, and what was to have been a quasi-scientific motion-picture-camera study of wild African life had resolved itself into an ordinary big-game hunt.

At the railhead, while preparations were going on to secure equipment and a safari, Stimbol had so offended and insulted the camera-man that he had left them flat and returned to the coast. Blake was disappointed, but he made up his mind to go on through and get what pictures he could with a still camera. He was not a man

who enjoyed killing for the mere sport of taking life, and as originally planned, there was to have been no shooting of game other than for food and in self-protection, with the exception of half a dozen trophies that Stimbol particularly wished to add to his collection.

There had since been one or two alterations relative to Stimbol's treatment of the black porters, but these matters, Blake was hopeful, had been ironed out, and Stimbol had promised to leave the handling of the safari entirely to Blake and refrain from any further abuse of the men.

They had come into the interior even farther than they had planned, had had the poorest of luck in the matter of game, and were about to turn back toward the railhead. It seemed now to Blake that after all they were going to pull through without further difficulty, and that he and Stimbol would return to America together to all intent and purpose still friends; but just then a black porter caught his foot in an entangling creeper and stumbled, throwing his load to the ground.

DIRECTLY in front of the porter Stimbol and Blake were walking side by side, and as though guided by a malevolent power, the load crashed into Stimbol, hurling him to the earth. Stimbol and the porter scrambled to their feet amidst the laughter of the negroes who had witnessed the accident. The porter was grinning. Stimbol was flushed with anger.

"You damned clumsy nigger!" he cried, and before Blake could interfere or the porter protect himself, the angry white man stepped quickly over the fallen load and struck the black a terrific blow in the face that felled him; and as he lay there, stunned, Stimbol kicked him in the side. But only once! Before he could repeat the outrage, Blake seized him by the shoulder, wheeled him about and struck him precisely as he had struck the black.

Stimbol fell, rolled over on his side and reached for the automatic that hung at his hip; but quick as he was, Blake was quicker. "Cut that!" said Blake crisply, covering Stimbol with a .45. Stimbol's hand dropped from the grip of his gun. "Get up!" ordered Blake, and when the other had risen: "Now listen to me, Stimbol—this is the end. You and I are through. Tomorrow morning we split the safari and equipment, and whichever way

you go with your half, I'll go in the opposite direction."

Blake had returned his gun to its holster as he spoke; the black had arisen and was nursing a bloody nose; the other blacks were looking on sullenly. Blake motioned to the porter to pick up his load, and presently the safari was again on the move—a sullen safari without laughter or song.

Blake made camp at the first available ground shortly before noon in order that the division of equipment, food and men could be made during the afternoon, and the two safaris thus be enabled to make an early start the following morning.

Stimbol, sullen, would give no assistance, but taking a couple of the askari, the armed natives who act as soldiers for the safari, started out from camp to hunt. He had proceeded scarcely a mile along a mold-padded game-trail which gave forth no sound in answer to their falling footsteps, when one of the natives in the lead held up his hand in warning as he halted.

Stimbol advanced cautiously, and the black pointed toward the left, through the foliage. Dimly, Stimbol saw a black mass moving slowly away from them.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Gorilla," replied the black.

Stimbol raised his rifle and fired at the retreating figure. The black was not surprised that he missed.

"Hell!" ejaculated the white. "Come on, get after him! I've got to have him. Gad, what a trophy he'll make!"

The jungle was rather more open than usual, and again and again they came within sight of the retreating gorilla. Each time Stimbol fired, and each time he missed. Secretly the blacks were amused and pleased. They did not like Stimbol.

AT a distance Tarzan of the Apes, hunting with the tribe of Toyat, heard the first shot, and immediately took to the trees and was racing in the direction of the sound. He felt sure that the weapon had not been discharged by the Beduins, for he well knew and could differentiate between the reports of their muskets and those made by modern weapons.

Perhaps, he thought, there might be among them such a rifle, because such was not impossible, but more likely it meant white men, and in Tarzan's country it was his business to know what strangers were there and why. Seldom they came even

now, though once they had never come. It was those days that Tarzan regretted, for when the white man comes, peace and happiness depart.

Racing through the trees, swinging from limb to limb, Tarzan of the Apes unerringly followed the direction of the sound of the succeeding shots, and as he approached more closely, he heard crashing of underbrush and the voices of men.

Bolgani, fleeing with greater haste than caution, his mind and attention occupied by thoughts of escape from the hated Tarmangani and the terrifying thunder-stick that roared each time the Tarmangani came within sight of him, abandoned his accustomed wariness and hurried through the jungle, forgetful of what few other enemies might beset his path; and so it was that he failed to see Histah the snake draped in sinuous loops along an overhanging branch of a great tree near by.

The huge python, naturally short-tempered and irritable, had been disturbed and annoyed by the crashing sounds of pursuit and escape, and the roaring voice of the rifle. Ordinarily he would have permitted a full-grown bull gorilla to pass unmolested, but in his present state of mind he might have attacked even Tantor himself.

His beady eyes glaring fixedly, he watched the approach of the shaggy Bolgani, and as the gorilla passed beneath the limb to which he clung, Histah launched himself upon his prey.

As the great coils, powerful, relentless, silent, encircled him, Bolgani sought to tear the hideous folds from about him. Great is the strength of Bolgani, but even greater is that of Histah the snake. A single hideous, almost human scream burst from the lips of Bolgani with the first realization of the disaster that had befallen him; and then he was on the ground tearing futilely at the steadily tightening bands of living steel that would crush the life from him, crush until his bones gave to the tremendous pressure, until only broken pulp remained within a sausage-like thing that would slip between the distended jaws of the serpent.

It was upon this sight that Stimbol and Tarzan came simultaneously—Stimbol stumbling awkwardly through the underbrush, Tarzan of the Apes, demigod of the forest, swinging gracefully through the foliage of the middle terraces.

They arrived simultaneously, but Tar-

zan was the only one of the party whose presence was unsuspected by the others; for as always, he had moved silently and with the utmost wariness, because of the unknown nature of the conditions he might discover.

As he looked down upon the scene below, his quick eye and his knowledge of the jungle revealed at a glance the full story of the tragedy that had overtaken Bolgani, and then he saw Stimbol raise his rifle, intent upon bagging two royal specimens with a single shot.

In the heart of Tarzan was no great love for Bolgani the gorilla. Since childhood the shaggy, giant man-beast had been the natural foe of the ape-man. His first mortal combat had been with Bolgani. For years he had feared him, or rather avoided him through caution, for of fear Tarzan was ignorant; and since he had emerged from childhood he had continued to avoid Bolgani for the simple reason that his own people, the great apes, avoided him.

But now when he saw the huge brute beset by two of the natural enemies of both the Mangani and the Bolgani, there flared within his breast a sudden loyalty that burned away his lifelong prejudices.

He was directly above Stimbol, and with such celerity do the mind and muscles of the ape-man coöperate, that even as the American raised his weapon to his shoulder, Tarzan had dropped upon his back, felling him to the earth; and before Stimbol could discover what had happened to him, long before he could stumble, cursing, to his feet, Tarzan, who had been unarmed, had snatched the hunter's knife from its scabbard and leaped full upon the writhing, struggling mass of python and gorilla.

STIMBOL came to his feet ready to kill, but what he saw before him temporarily drove the desire for vengeance from his mind.

Naked but for a loin-cloth, bronzed, black-haired, a giant white man battled with the dread python; and as Stimbol watched, he shuddered as he became aware that the low, beastlike growls he heard came not alone from the savage lips of the gorilla, but from the throat of the godlike man-thing that battled with him against the snake.

Steely fingers encircled the snake just back of its head, while those of the free

hand drove Stimbol's hunting knife again and again into the coiling, writhing body of the serpent. With the projection of a new and more menacing enemy into the battle, Histah was forced partially to release his hold upon Bolgani—with, at first, the intention of including Tarzan in the same embrace that he might crush them both at once. But soon he discovered that the hairless man-thing constituted a distinct menace to his life that would necessitate his undivided attention, and so he quickly uncoiled from about Bolgani and in a frenzy of rage and pain that whipped his great length into a lashing fury of destruction, he sought to encircle the ape-man. But wheresoever his coils approached, the keen knife bit deep into tortured flesh.

Bolgani, the spark of life all but crushed from him, lay gasping upon the ground, unable to come to the aid of his preserver, while Stimbol, goggle-eyed with awe and terror, kept at a safe distance, momentarily forgetful both of his lust for trophies and his bent for revenge.

ALREADY Histah had encircled the torso and one leg of the ape-man, but his powers of constriction, lessened by the frightful wounds he had received, had as yet been unable to crush his adversary into helplessness, and Tarzan was now concentrating his attention and the heavy blade of the hunting-knife upon the single portion of the weakening body, in an attempt to cut Histah in two.

Man and serpent were red with blood; and crimson were the grasses and the brush for yards in all directions as, with a final effort, Histah closed his giant coils spasmodically about his victim at the instant that Tarzan with a mighty upward heavy lunge cut through the vertebræ of the great snake.

Lashing and writhing, the nether portion, headless, flopped aside; while the ape-man, still fighting with what remained, exerting his superhuman strength to its ultimate utmost, slowly forced the coils from about his body and cast the dying Histah from him. Then, without a glance at Stimbol, he turned to Bolgani.

"You are hurt to death?" he asked in the language of the great apes.

"No," replied the gorilla. "I am Bolgani! I kill, Tarmangani!"

"I am Tarzan of the Apes," said the ape-man. "I saved you from Histah."

"You did not come to kill Bolgani?" inquired the gorilla.

"No. Let us be friends."

Bolgani frowned in an effort to concentrate upon this remarkable problem. Presently he spoke. "We will be friends," he said. "The Tarmangani behind you will kill us both with his thunder-stick. Let us kill him first." Painfully he staggered to his feet.

"No," remonstrated Tarzan. "I will send the Tarmangani away."

you too." The American was none too sure of what the attitude of the white giant might be, for all too fresh in his mind was the startling and disconcerting manner of the wild man's introduction, but he felt safe because he held a rifle, while the other was unarmed; and he guessed that the giant might be only too glad to be saved from the attentions of the gorilla—which, from Stimbol's imagined knowledge of such beasts, appeared to him to be quite evidently threatening.



Stimbol rolled over and reached for the automatic at his hip. "Cut that!" said Blake crisply.

"You? He will not go."

"I am Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle," replied the ape-man. "The word of Tarzan is law in the jungle."

Stimbol, who had been watching, was under the impression that the man and the beast were growling at one another and that a new duel impended. Had he guessed the truth and suspected that they considered him a common enemy, he would have felt far less at ease. Now, his rifle regained, he started toward Tarzan just as the latter turned to address him.

"Stand to one side, young fellow," said Stimbol, "while I finish that gorilla. After the experience you just had with the snake, I doubt if you want that fellow to jump

Tarzan halted directly between Bolgani and the hunter and eyed the latter appraisingly for a moment. "Lower your rifle," he said presently. "You are not going to shoot the gorilla."

"The hell I'm not!" ejaculated Stimbol. "What do you suppose I've been chasing him through the jungle for?"

"You were under a misapprehension," replied Tarzan.

"What misapprehension?"

"That you were going to shoot him. You are not."

"Say, young man, do you know who I am?" demanded Stimbol.

"I am not interested," replied Tarzan coldly.

"Well, you'd better be. I'm Wilbur Stimbol, of Stimbol & Company, brokers, New York!" That was a name to conjure with—in New York. Even in Paris and London it had opened many a door. Seldom had it failed the purpose of this purse-arrogant man.

"What are you doing in my country?" demanded the ape-man, ignoring Stimbol's egotistical statement of his identity.

"Your country? Who the hell are you?"

TARZAN turned toward the two blacks who had been standing a little in the rear of Stimbol and to one side. "I am Tarzan of the Apes," he said to them in their own dialect. "What is this man doing in my country? How many are there in his party—how many white men?"

"Big Bwana," replied one of the men with sincere deference, "we knew that you were Tarzan of the Apes when we saw you swing from the trees and slay the great snake. There is no other in all the jungle who could do that. This white man is a bad master. There is one other white man with him. The other is kind. They came to hunt Simba the lion and other big game. They have had no luck. Tomorrow they turn back."

"Where is their camp?" then demanded Tarzan.

The black who had spoken pointed. "It is not far," he said.

The ape-man turned to Stimbol. "Go back to your camp," he said. "I shall come there later this evening and talk with you and your companion. In the meantime, hunt no more except for food in Tarzan's country."

There was something in the voice and manner of the stranger that had finally gone through Stimbol's thick sensibilities and impressed him with a species of awe—a thing he had scarcely ever experienced in the past except in the presence of wealth that was grossly superior to his own. He did not reply. He just stood and watched the bronzed giant turn to the gorilla. He heard them growl at one another for a moment, and then, to his vast surprise, he saw them move off through the jungle together, shoulder to shoulder; and as the foliage closed about them, he removed his helmet and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a silken handkerchief as he stood staring at the green branches that had parted to receive this strangely assorted pair.

Finally he turned to his men with an oath. "A whole day wasted!" he complained. "Who is this fellow? You seemed to know him."

"He is Tarzan," replied one of them.

"Tarzan? Never heard of him," snapped Stimbol.

"All who know the jungle, know Tarzan."

"Humph!" sneered Stimbol. "No lousy wild man is going to tell Wilbur Stimbol where he can hunt and where he can't."

"Master," said the black who had first spoken, "the word of Tarzan is the law of the jungle. Do not offend him."

"I'm not paying you damned niggers for advice," snapped Stimbol. "If I say hunt, we hunt, and don't you forget it." But on their return to camp they saw no game, or at least Stimbol saw none. What the blacks saw was their own affair.

CHAPTER V

THE TARMANGANI

DURING Stimbol's absence from camp Blake had been occupied in dividing the food and equipment into two equal parts which were arranged for Stimbol's inspection and approval; but the division of the porters and askari he had left until the other's return, and was writing in his diary when the hunting-party returned.

He could see at a glance that Stimbol was in bad humor, but as that was the older man's usual state of temper, it caused Blake no particular anxiety, but rather gave him cause for added relief that on the morrow he would be rid of his ill-natured companion for good.

Blake was more concerned, however, by the sullen demeanor of the askari who had accompanied Stimbol, for it meant to the younger man that his companion had found some new occasion for bullying, abusing or insulting them, and the difficulty of dividing the safari thus increased. Blake had felt from the moment that he had definitely reached the decision to separate from Stimbol that one of the greatest obstacles they would have to overcome to carry out the plan would be to find sufficient men, willing to submit themselves to Stimbol's ideas of discipline, properly to transport his luggage and provisions and guard them and him.

As Stimbol passed and saw the two piles of equipment, the frown upon his face deepened. "I see you've got the stuff laid out," he remarked, as he halted before Blake.

"Yes, I wanted you to look it over and see that it is satisfactorily divided before I have it packed."

"I don't want to be bothered with it,"



Steely fingers encircled the snake just back of its head, while the free hand drove the knife into its body.

replied the other. "I know you wouldn't take any advantage of me on the division."

"Thanks," replied Blake.

"How about the niggers?"

"That's not going to be so easy. You know you haven't treated them very well, and there will not be many of them anxious to return with you."

"There's where you're dead wrong, Blake. The trouble with you is that you don't know anything about niggers. You're too easy with 'em. They haven't any respect for you, and the man they don't respect, they don't like. They know that a fellow who beats 'em is their master, and they know that a master is going to look after them. They wouldn't want to trust themselves on a long trek with you. You divided the junk, now let me handle the blacks—that's more in my line; and I'll see that you get a square deal and a good, safe bunch, and I'll put the fear of God into 'em so they won't dare be anything but loyal to you."

"Just how do you purpose selecting the men?" asked Blake.

"Well, in the first place I'd like you to have those men who may wish to accompany you—I'll grant there are a few; so we'll just have 'em all up, explain that we are separating, and I'll tell all those who wish to return with your safari to step forward. Then I'll choose some good men

from what are left and make up enough that way to complete your quota—see? That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"It's quite fair," agreed Blake. He was hoping that the plan would work out as easily as Stimbol appeared to believe that it would, but he was far from believing, and so he thought it best to suggest an alternative that he was confident would have to be resorted to in the end. "In the event that one of us has difficulty in securing the requisite number of volunteers," he said, "I believe that we can enlist the necessary men by offering a bonus to be paid upon safe arrival at the railhead. If I am short of men, I shall be willing to do so."

"Not a bad idea if you're afraid you can't hold 'em together after I leave you," said Stimbol. "It will be an added factor of safety for you, too; but as for me, my men will live up to their original agreement or there'll be some mighty sick niggers in these parts. What say we have 'em up and find out just how much of a job we've got on our hands?" He glanced about until his eyes fell on a head man. "Here, you!" he called. "Come here and make it snappy."

THE black approached and stopped before the two white men. "You called me, Bwana?" he asked.

"Gather up everyone in camp," directed Stimbol. "Have them up here in five minutes for a palaver—every last man-jack of them."

"Yes, Bwana."

As the head man withdrew, Stimbol turned to Blake. "Any stranger in camp today?" he asked.

"No, why?"

"Ran across a wild man while I was hunting," replied Stimbol. "He ordered

me out of the jungle. What do you know about that?" And Stimbol laughed.

"A wild man?"

"Yes. Some crazy nut, I suppose. The niggers seemed to know about him."

"Who is he?"

"Calls himself Tarzan."

Blake elevated his brows. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "You have met Tarzan of the Apes and he has ordered you out of the jungle?"

"You've heard of him?"

"Certainly; and if he ever orders me out of his jungle, I'll go."

"You would, but not Wilbur Stimbol."

"Why did he order you out?" asked Blake.

"He just ordered me out, that's all. Wouldn't let me shoot a gorilla I'd been stalking. The fellow saved the gorilla from a python, killed the python, ordered me out of the jungle, said he'd visit us in camp later and walked away with the gorilla like they were old pals. I never saw anything like it, but it doesn't make any difference to me who or what he thinks he is—I know who and what I am, and it's going to take more than a half-wit to scare me out of this country till I'm good and ready to go."

"So you think Tarzan of the Apes is a half-wit?"

"I think anyone's a half-wit who'd run about this jungle naked and unarmed."

"You'll find he's not a half-wit, Stimbol; and unless you want to get in more trouble than you ever imagined existed, you'll do just as Tarzan of the Apes tells you to do."

"What do you know about him? Have you ever seen him?"

"No," replied Blake, "but I have heard a lot about him from our men. He's as much a part of this locality as the jungle, or the lions. Very few, if any, of our men have seen him, but he has the same hold upon their imaginations and superstitions as any of their demons, and they are even more fearful of incurring his displeasure. If they think Tarzan has it in for us, we're out of luck."

"Well, all I've got to say is that if this monkey-man knows when he's well off, he'll not come butting into the affairs of Wilbur Stimbol."

"And he's coming to visit us, is he?" said Blake. "Well, I certainly want to see him. I've heard of nothing much else since we struck his country."

"It's funny I never heard of him," said Stimbol.

"You never talk with the men," Blake reminded him.

"Gad, it seems as though I'm doing nothing but talk to them," grumbled Stimbol.

"I said, talk *with* them."

"I don't chum with niggers," sneered Stimbol.

Blake grinned.

"**H**ERE are the men," said Stimbol. He turned toward the waiting porters and askari and cleared his throat. "Mr. Blake and I are going to separate," he announced. "Everything has been divided. I am going to hunt a little further to the west, make a circle toward the south and return to the coast by a new route. I do not know what Mr. Blake's plans are, but he is going to get half the porters and half the askari and I want to tell you niggers right now that there isn't going to be any funny business about it. Half of you are going with Mr. Blake, whether you like it or not." He paused, impressively, to let the full weight of his pronouncement sink home. "As usual," he continued, "I wish to keep everyone contented and happy, so I'm going to give you who may want to go with Mr. Blake an opportunity to do so. Now, listen! The packs over on that side are Mr. Blake's; those on this side are mine. All those who are willing to accompany Mr. Blake, go over on that side!"

There was a moment's hesitation upon the part of the men, and then some of them moved quietly over among Blake's packs. Others followed as their understanding slowly grasped the meaning of Stimbol's words, until all of the men stood upon Blake's side.

Stimbol turned to Blake with a laugh and a shake of his head. "Gad!" he exclaimed. "Did you ever see such a dumb bunch? No one could have explained the thing more simply than I and yet look at 'em! Not one of them understood me!"

"Are you quite sure of that, Stimbol?" inquired Blake.

STIMBOL did not immediately grasp the insinuation. When he did he scowled. "Don't be a fool," he snapped. "Of course they misunderstood me." He turned angrily toward the men. "You thick-skulled black idiots! Can't you

understand anything?" he demanded. "I did not say that you all had to go with Mr. Blake—only those who wished to. Now the rest of you—those who wish to accompany me—get back over here on this side with my packs, and step lively!"

No one moved in the direction of Stimbol's packs.

The man flushed.

"This is mutiny!" he stormed. "Who-

them, you insult them, and they will fear you and hate you. You have done all these things to them, and they do fear you and hate you. You have sowed, and now you are reaping. I hope to God that it will teach you a lesson. There is just one way to get your men, and that is to offer them a big bonus. Are you willing to do that?"

Stimbol, his self-assurance momentarily



"Go back to your camp," the ape-man said. "I shall come there later and talk with you. Meantime, hunt no more except for food, in Tarzan's country."

ever is at the bottom of this is going to suffer. Come here, you!" He motioned to a headman. "Who put you fellows up to this? Has Mr. Blake been telling you what to do?"

"Don't be a fool, Stimbol," said Blake. "No one has influenced the men, and there is no mutiny. The plan was yours. The men have done just what you told them to. If it had not been for your insufferable egotism, you would have known precisely what the outcome would be. These black men are human beings. In some respects they are extremely sensitive human beings, and in many ways they are like children. You strike them, you curse

shaken at last, wilted in the face of the realization that Blake was right. He looked around helplessly for a moment. The blacks, sullen-faced, stood there like dumb beasts, staring at him. In all those eyes there was no single friendly glance. He turned back to Blake. "See what you can do with them," he said.

Blake faced the men. "It will be necessary for half of you to accompany Mr. Stimbol back to the coast," he said. "He will pay double wages to all those who go with him, provided that you serve him loyally. Talk it over among yourselves and send word to us later by your head men. That is all. You may go."

The balance of the afternoon passed, the two white men keeping to their respective tents; the blacks gathered in groups, whispering. Blake and Stimbol no longer messed together, but after the evening meal each appeared with his pipe to await the report of the headmen. After half an hour Blake sent his boy to summon them, and presently they came and stood before the young man.

"Well, have the men decided who will accompany Mr. Stimbol?" he asked.

"No one will accompany the old *bwana*," replied their spokesman. "All will go with the young *bwana*."

"But Mr. Stimbol will pay them well," Blake reminded, "and half of you must go with him."

The black shook his head. "He could not make the pay big enough," he said. "No boy will go with him."

"You agreed to come out with us and return with us," said Blake. "You must fulfill your agreement."

"We agreed to come out with both of you and return with both of you. There was nothing said about returning separately. We will live up to our agreement, and the old *bwana* may return in safety with the young *bwana*." There was finality in the tone of the spokesman.

Blake thought for a moment before replying.

"You may go," he said then. "I will talk with you again in the morning."

THE blacks had departed but a moment when the figure of a man appeared suddenly out of the darkness into the light of the camp fire.

"Who the—oh, it's you is it?" exclaimed Stimbol. "Here's the wild man, Blake."

The young American turned and surveyed the figure of the bronze giant who was standing just within the circle of the firelight. He noted the clean-cut features, the quiet dignity, the majestic mien and smiled inwardly at recollection of Stimbol's description of this godlike creature—a half-wit! "So you are Tarzan of the Apes!" he said.

Tarzan inclined his head. "And you?" he asked.

"I am Jim Blake of New York," replied the American.

"Hunting of course?"

"With a camera."

"Your companion was using a rifle," Tarzan reminded him.

"I am not responsible for his acts. I cannot control them," replied Blake.

"Nor anyone else," snapped Stimbol.

FOR an instant Tarzan permitted his gaze to move to Stimbol, but he ignored the boast.

"I overheard the conversation between you and the headmen," he said, addressing Blake. "Some of your blacks had already told me something about your companion and twice today I have had an opportunity to form an estimate of my own from personal observation, so I assume that you are separating because you cannot agree. Am I right?"

"Yes," acknowledged Blake.

"And after you separate—what are your plans?"

"I intend to push in a little further west and then swing—" commenced Stimbol.

"I was speaking to Blake," interrupted Tarzan; "my plans concerning you are already made."

"Well, who the—"


"Silence!" admonished the ape-man. "Go ahead, Blake!"

"We have not had much luck so far," replied Blake, "principally because we never can agree on methods. The result is that I have scarcely a single decent wild animal study. I had planned to go north a way in search of lion pictures. I dislike going back without anything to show for the time and money I have put into the expedition, but now that the men have refused to accompany us separately there is nothing for it but to return to the coast by the shortest route."

"You two don't seem to be taking me into consideration at all," grumbled Stimbol. "I've got as much money and time in this trip as Blake. You forget that I'm here to hunt, and what's more I'm going to hunt, and I'm not going straight back to the coast by a damned sight, monkey-man or no monkey-man."

Again Tarzan ignored Stimbol. "Get ready to move out about an hour after sunrise," he said to Blake. "There will be no trouble about dividing the safari. I shall be here to attend to that and give you your final instructions." And as he spoke, he turned and disappeared in the darkness.

Again next month you may, with Tarzan, be lord of the jungle—in the forthcoming January issue.



"What's wrong?" he demanded. "The bank's been robbed," replied Jess White.

Illustrated by
William Molt

The Sheriff Functions

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

The man who wrote "Gunsight Pass" and many other well-remembered novels of Western life is at his best in this spirited story.

THE day was hot and drowsy; the little town lay in a coma of sunshine. On the plaza a dog lazily hunted for fleas. The court of public opinion, represented by a group of citizens loafing on the porch of the Mesa House, was in indolent session.

Only two men could be seen on the street. They moved toward each other and would presently meet in front of the Mesa House, if neither turned or deflected.

"By jing!" exclaimed Jess White, one of the porch sitters. "By jing, Bob Rhodes and Nick Dawson!"

A little wave of excitement stirred on the porch, for the relations between these two men were known to be strained. One of the two wore miners' boots, a corduroy suit, a broad-brimmed white hat, pinched-in in Western fashion. This was Bob Rhodes, sheriff of the county.

The other was a large man dressed in a well-cut tailor-made suit. He was the banker and capitalist of the town.

Nick Dawson waved jovially toward the porch sitters. He had a loud laugh, a cheerful voice, a ready smile. "Slick" was an adjective often applied to him.

None of the assets mentioned belonged to Rhodes. He was small, quiet, soft-spoken. But not inconspicuous—far from that. His movements were rhythmic and sure. He was perfectly poised. His personality would have stood out even if he had not been a marked man, marked as dangerous. Many years before he had made history in Mesa when the place had been a frontier town. He might make it again. That was why the battery of eyes watched him rather than Dawson as the two men approached.

Rhodes had prospected for gold at Tombstone. He had fought Apaches on the border and Spaniards at Santiago. He had carried a gun during a famous range war. But one two-minute period of his life had set him apart from the rest of the race. During that short interval he had snuffed out the lives of three men and wounded and captured two others. A road-agent gang had made the mistake of attacking a stage when Rhodes had been the shotgun messenger. He had killed ruthlessly, swiftly, unerringly. Therefore men looked at him, talked about him, wondered at him!

Nick Dawson had "skinned" the sheriff out of a mine. He had done it legally and with much explanatory justification. Rhodes had not killed him. That was what always made for drama at the meeting of the two. Were the killing days of Rhodes over? Had time and civilization tamed him? Nobody knew. He had made a confidant of no man as to his feeling toward Dawson.

For one moment the eyes of the approaching men met—those of Rhodes gray, steady, and cold, those of Dawson black and shifty. Without a word the two passed.

The tongue of public opinion clacked. Jess White eased himself in his chair and took another chew of tobacco.

"No, sir," he protested in a shrill falsetto, "Bob Rhodes aint what he was. He's got you fellows buffaloed because he keeps his mouth shut. But he's through. Understand? Didn't he let Nick skin him outa the Silver Lode, an' nothing doing? Y' betcha! Why? He's like a horse that's been stove up—all through!"

Old Jack Allardyce took up the argument. He was a retired cattleman, "big as all outdoors." Jack and Jess were always on opposite sides. They were old friends who spent most of their time nagging each other.

"Nothing to that," dissented Jack now. "He's a law-abidin' citizen, Bob is. Always was. And he's got horse sense. Say he killed Nick—what then? He'd go to the pen sure. An' he'd have to leave that li'l girl of his with no one to look after her."

"Mebbe he's waitin' for a good show, so as it would look like self-defense," guessed Judge Crisp. "He aint a plumb fool, Bob aint."

"Anyhow, I'll bet a doughnut Nick don't rest any too easy. Betcha he wishes he hadn't been so dawggone smooth," a fourth member of the bench suggested. "Leastways, that's how I'd feel—and Nick aint the gamest man in Arizona."

BOB RHODES stopped in front of a four-room log cabin and turned in at the gate. The place was trim and well-kept, the lawn green, the walk bordered with fragrant mignonette. A handsome pepper tree drooped toward the roof and shaded it. In the back yard two orange trees were laden with fruit.

The door opened and a little girl came flying down the walk. She was a freckled, red-headed child, and in her makeup chubby legs, wildly flying hair and dancing eyes seemed to be featured. Some day she was going to be very pretty, but just now she was in the ugly duckling stage. The sheriff did not know this. To him she was very beautiful, for she was all he had, a treasure left him by the wife and sweetheart who had smiled good-bye and passed into the land beyond.

"Daddy, daddy!" she screamed, and flung herself joyfully into the arms of her father. His weather-beaten face softened, irradiated by love.

They walked into the house. She chattered about the school-day while they ate the dinner, prepared by a slant-eyed Mongolian. Afterward they set out together, she to return to her school, he to his duties.

To his deputy, Tom Forbes, who was also the jailer, the sheriff gave directions as he climbed into an old flivver.

"Going to take a run over that Jacaton country, Tom," he explained. "Want to talk to two or three fellows about this cattle-rustling. Too much of it going on there."

As he drove out of town, Dawson passed in his big car, leaving a cloud of yellow dust in his wake. The banker was alone in the car; usually a chauffeur drove him.

There had been a sprinkle of rain and Rhodes noticed that no car had passed since that time except the banker's limousine. He wondered negligently what was taking Dawson out of town. The desert road wandered up and down little hills, through greasewood and *palo verde* and ironwood, and into a grove of *sahueros*. Gradually it climbed toward the foothills. A wagon trail ran into an arroyo between two bluffs. Dawson's car had taken that road. Why? It led to no ranch, only to a deserted sheep-camp.

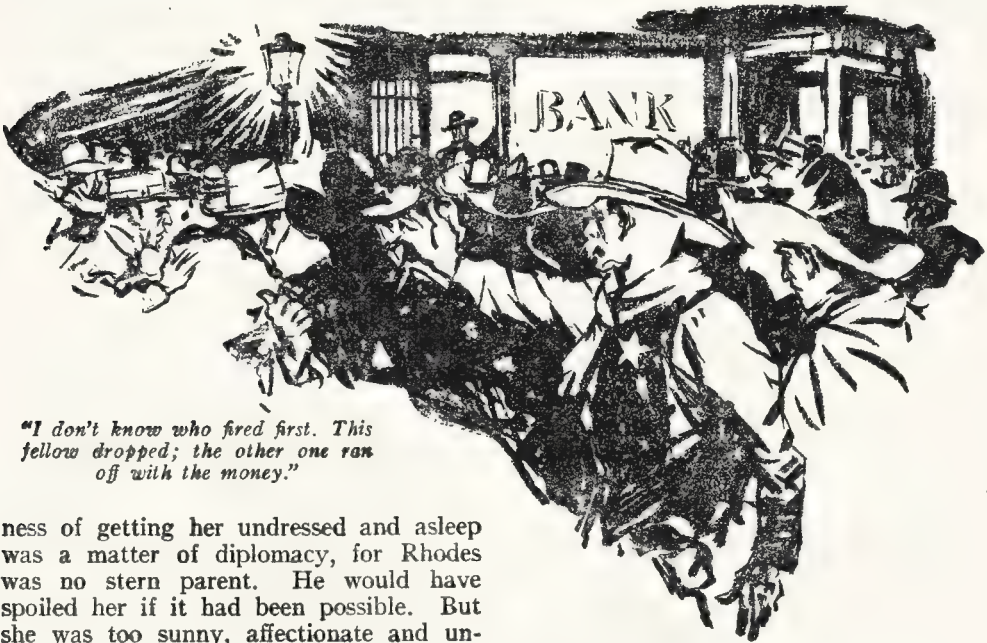
The sheriff drove on to Jacaton, met and talked with several cattlemen, then returned to Mesa about sunset. Little Jane came hippity-hop down the walk to meet him as he stopped at the house. In two minutes she had told him the school news, what they were going to have for supper, and next the history of a neighbor child's pups, one of which had been promised to her in the near future.

The father listened, made appropriate comments. These hours with little Jane were very happy ones. Perhaps it was

because he would do nothing to jeopardize them that he had let Dawson "get away" with his mine. Yet it was for Jane that he had wanted the mine. It was to have educated her and given her a nest-egg. Supper finished, Rhodes worked in the garden, Jane very busily helping him, after which he took her in his lap and read to her until bedtime. She was always very frisky at this hour. The busi-

It was a scene of confusion upon which the sheriff came when he reached the bank. Already a crowd was gathering and he had to push his way through to reach the door. The cashier, shod in slippers and wearing pajamas beneath his suit, admitted him to the building. Three or four men were inside; among them was Nick Dawson.

The banker was talking excitedly. "I



"I don't know who fired first. This fellow dropped; the other one ran off with the money."

ness of getting her undressed and asleep was a matter of diplomacy, for Rhodes was no stern parent. He would have spoiled her if it had been possible. But she was too sunny, affectionate and unselfish for that. . . .

It was sometime in the small hours of the night that Rhodes heard some one pounding on the front door and an excited voice calling to him. He was out of bed in an instant and at a window.

"What's wrong?" he demanded crisply.

"The bank has been robbed. Dawson said to bring you."

The man who replied was little Jess White.

"Wait for me," Rhodes ordered.

Rapidly he got into his clothes and joined White. As they walked toward the bank the sheriff asked low-voiced questions of the messenger. But White knew little about what had taken place. He had been awakened by the sound of shots and had run out to the street after dressing sketchily. There he had seen Dawson among others. The banker had sent him at once to bring the sheriff. He had heard some one say a man had been shot.

heard voices when they blew up the safe," he exclaimed. "So I grabbed a revolver and came down. They were running out of the bank. One of 'em saw me and yelled to the other. I don't know who fired first, me or them. First I knew we were all firing—a regular fusillade. This fellow dropped and the other one ran off. He carried the gunny-sack with the money. His horse was under the cottonwood out there. He jumped on it and galloped away."

Rhodes moved forward. The body of a man lay on the floor. He was heavy-set but not tall, and was dressed as a cowboy or a rancher. In age he was perhaps forty-five.

"You had the body carried in?" the sheriff asked.

Dawson nodded. "The crowd was gathering so fast that we had to take it somewhere."

The sheriff stooped and examined the

body. "He was firing at you when you shot him, didn't you say?"

"Yes."

"How far from him were you? Would you recognize the other man if you saw him?"

"I don't know. He was slimmer than this one, and younger."

"You weren't very close to them then?"

"No. Across the street—a little way down. I had just come out from the house—hadn't taken more than eight or ten steps when they saw me. I don't suppose the whole thing took more than a few seconds."

The sheriff gave instructions to the cashier. "Call up Piñon, Summit, Centerville and Mammoth, and warn them to head off the robber if he shows up."

He made a swift examination of the room. A sledgehammer, a small hatchet, a chisel and a "jimmy" lay scattered on the floor, as well as a piece of soap and a small bottle labeled "nitro-glycerine." The safe had been blown open and its contents flung into confusion. Gold pieces and silver were scattered among the papers. "Can you tell how much has been taken?" Rhodes asked.

The banker hesitated, then lowered his voice so that the others could not hear. "Not accurately, but the monthly payroll of the new railroad construction gang was inside. We were sending it out tomorrow."

"How much?"

"Close to fifty thousand. They got some bills besides."

"The payroll was in currency?"

"Mostly in bills—some in silver."

"And that is gone?"

"Yes." Dawson added after a moment, "Some one must have talked."

"Looks like. You'll have the whole amount checked up as soon as possible, I suppose."

"Of course."

"You're insured against robbery?"

"Yes, but that doesn't satisfy me. I want the fellow caught. I'll offer a reward of ten thousand dollars for his arrest and the return of the plunder."

AFTER the sheriff had examined the interior carefully he joined the growing crowd outside. There were certain things he wanted to know and he might find them out by casual gossip. He moved over to a group surrounding the

dead robber's horse. It was a sorrel with white stockings. The brand was a Quarter Circle K on the left shoulder.

"I saw a fellow ridin' that horse into town this very evenin'," Jack Allardyce remarked.

Rhodes did not ask him if he was sure. A townsman might be mistaken about identifying a horse, but not an old ranchman.

"What kind of a fellow?" the sheriff questioned.

"Heavy-set, sandy-complected."

This evidently was the man Dawson had killed.

"Anyone with him?"

"No. Like enough they wouldn't ride in together, though."

The sheriff could find nobody in Mesa who had seen or heard the escaped bandit while he was galloping out of town. He picked up rumors of this or that person who had seen a rider flying through the night, but when he ran them down they came to nothing.

The bank robbery was of course the exclusive topic of conversation in the town. Dawson's courage in stepping out from his house and facing the outlaws was highly commended. Though the bank was protected against robbery, its president had posters printed offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for the capture of the surviving bandit, dead or alive, and the recovery of his booty. This was signed by Dawson. Naturally this tended to keep the interest alive. A good many men in the county would have liked that ten thousand.

Bob Rhodes felt that he could use it. Ten thousand would see little Jane through school very nicely and leave something over. The sheriff organized volunteer posses and sent them out into the hills. He did not go with any of them himself, and there was a faint murmur of criticism at this, a murmur which might become a good deal louder at election-time.

Rhodes had other views. There was no use combing the hills for a man who had plenty of time to disappear, a man of whom they had no accurate description. For all anybody knew he might live on the edge of town. The sheriff devoted his time to other methods. He sent out a few more telegrams and took a solitary drive in his rattling old car. It took him in the direction of Jacaton. He turned



*"It's you—Nick Dawson!"
Rhodes beat him to the draw; a
.38 clattered to the platform.*

off into the arroyo leading to the sheep-camp, following the still visible tracks of the wheels of Dawson's car. He did not expect to find anybody at the old cabin, but he took the precaution to see that his revolver was ready for action before he stepped from the car.

Evenly, with no undue speed, he moved toward the hut. From the window, at any moment, there might come a bullet plowing into his heart. That was a risk he must take. It would be the penalty of bad judgment, for if he had guessed correctly, there would be nobody in the cabin.

He walked straight to the door and pushed it open. One glance showed him that nobody was here, a second glance that it had recently been inhabited. On the bunk were dirty blankets thrown back as though some one had stepped out of them. On the table were odds and ends of food. The bread was still soft to the touch.

Rhodes reconstructed in his mind the situation. Somebody had left the cabin within the past twenty-four hours, intending to return. Whoever he was the man had meant to stay. Otherwise the blankets would have been rolled to save time on his return, for time just then would have been very valuable. Probably they would have been removed to some convenient spot on the desert so that they could be picked up without a detour. No, clearly the man had meant to come back. Probably if interrogated he would have

claimed he was a desert rat prospecting for gold. A pick and shovel in the room lent color to this conjecture.

But the man had not returned. Why? Would he still find his way here? Or was he lying dead in the undertaking room at Mesa, shot to death by Nick Dawson? That was the sheriff's guess.

One man had been staying here, not two. There were blankets for one. On the table were one tin plate, one cup, both still unwashed. There were no others in the cabin.

What about the second robber who had fled on horseback with the loot? To Rhodes that phantom of the night was more mysterious than he was to the other citizens of Mesa. Nobody had noticed him coming to town. Nobody except Dawson had seen him while in the village. Nobody had heard him ride away. It was strange that he had not been, previous to the robbery, holed up in this cabin with the other bandit. Why leave two trails when one would do?

In point of fact the second robber had left no trace, none that could be picked up. He seemed to have vanished into the air. Perhaps he was the product of Dawson's imagination.

Either Dawson, in that event, had been excited and seen double, or else for reasons of his own he had told what was not true. The first supposition was not likely. The second—well, that seemed more rea-

sonable, after Rhodes had later in the day received an answer to one of his wires.

THE SHERIFF'S interest in the drama was quickened. He had a theory about this robbery, and such evidence as was coming in supported it. If there was any truth in his view Dawson would probably within a day or two drive out again to the sheep-camp. This the banker did the second day after the robbery. Upon his return the sheriff also visited the camp. He spent three hours there minutely examining the cabin, the corral and the immediate neighborhood. He was satisfied that Dawson had gone into the cabin and straight back to his car, that he had not gone further than the arroyo.

From that time on the sheriff saw that the banker was shadowed everywhere he went. Tom Forbes kept track of him when his chief could not. It was therefore not surprising that Rhodes happened to be at the station when Dawson, suitcase in hand, stepped from his car to take the train for Los Angeles.

The banker had done a good deal of laughing up his sleeve at the sheriff. He had enjoyed offering the ten-thousand-dollar reward, knowing that it would not be collected. He had found it pleasant to watch Rhodes follow false clues.

Now, as the two met face to face, Dawson asked the officer with hidden irony how he was getting along with the case. With difficulty he kept the chuckle out of his voice, when he inquired whether Rhodes thought the stolen money would ever be recovered. There was a reason why this just at the moment was a particularly good joke.

"If I'm lucky, Mr. Dawson," the sheriff said quietly.

"Getting close to that ten-thousand-dollar reward, are you, Sheriff?"

This was a taunt. Rhodes understood it so, though the banker's manner was correct in its suggestion of solicitude.

"You can't ever tell."

"Kinda got a notion who the fellow was, have you?"

"Kinda."

The sheriff's steady, cold eyes looked full into those of the banker. For some reason Dawson's jauntiness fled. A chill ran down his spine. He shifted the suitcase from his right hand to his left. Perhaps he might want the right one free.

"Better set it down," the officer said.

"It must be real heavy. I'll carry it if you like."

There was a touch of irony in this suggestion. Rhodes believed there was fifty-odd thousand dollars in the bag.

Dawson tried to put his fears from him. They were absurd. This man could know nothing. No living man could. Yet his throat grew dry. He began to have the first haggard terror of the trapped animal. He wanted to strike and escape while it was safe.

"So—you know the robber?"

The big man's voice was a hoarse whisper. Those who had been listening were caught with the sense of a dramatic, perhaps a tragic, moment, though they knew nothing of the cause of it.

"I reckon."

The sheriff waited, poised, immobile.

"It—who is he?"

The answer was swift as the thrust of a rapier.

"It's *you*—Nick Dawson!"

Dawson's revolver flashed out instantly, but Rhodes beat him to the draw. A .38 clattered to the platform. Dawson looked at his bleeding hand with puzzled dismay.

"Drop that suitcase," the sheriff advised quietly.

The man dropped it.

"Step back into the car," ordered Rhodes.

"I've got to see a doctor," the banker whimpered.

"That'll be my business."

The officer tossed the suitcase into the car and followed it. To the chauffeur he gave the order, "Drive to the jail."

The perturbed chauffeur took one look at him, one at his crumpled employer, and obeyed orders.

AN hour later the sheriff passed the Mesa House on his way to dinner. The court of public opinion was as usual in session.

"Throw off an' head in with us, Bob," Allardyce invited.

Rhodes reflected that this was as good a place to tell his story as anywhere. From here it would spread all over the county. It was just as well to get the facts to the public before Nick Dawson circulated his story in rebuttal. He stepped onto the porch and waited.

"Tell it to us, Bob. Spill the whole thing, old-timer," Allardyce urged.

"Not much to tell, Jack. I kinda got a notion Dawson had the money in that suitcase—an' he had. I was lucky, I expect."

"Lucky, hell! You made yore luck, I reckon. But how? When did you first suspect Dawson?"

"Why right off it looked kinda queer, soon as he began to talk. He claimed he was across the street near this house when he shot the fellow. I knew 'twas a lie."

"How come?"

"Powder marks on the dead man's hair and temples. He was shot from right close. An' he wasn't shot from the front while he was firin' at Nick. He never did fire at Nick. The bullet holes would have showed in the wooden walls behind him, if he had. Of course, I didn't discover that till afterward. No, gentlemen, he was shot down from the side, unexpected."

"You mean—"

"By some one he wasn't lookin' for to shoot at him; by his pal."

"Why would his pal do that, Bob?"

"Why wouldn't he—if he wanted to destroy evidence? An' he figured what this fellow knew was all there was against him."

"Yore notion is they robbed the bank together, this fellow and Nick," Jess White said. "Trouble with that, Bob, is that Nick didn't have time to hide the stolen money before the other folks showed up. The smoke hadn't cleared when we was on the ground."

"Did I say that was my notion?" asked Rhodes in his low drawl.

"Well, did you or didn't you?" asked Jess exasperatedly, his voice rising in a shrill falsetto. "What else have you been leadin' up to?"

"I don't reckon they robbed the bank together! I expect we'll find that Nick robbed it before this fellow showed up. Easy enough for him to do it. He slipped out right after dark, say. Then his friend blew open the safe with him an' found the cupboard was bare. He was still mullin' it over when he was killed."

"But holy murder, Bob, if Nick had already robbed the bank, what was the sense of going after the money again? You get me all balled 'up."

"He wasn't going after the money. He was puttin' over the notion that men from the outside had done the job."

"By jing!" murmured Jess. "I'll bet that was the way of it."

"You found the money in the suitcase, did you?" asked Allardyce.

"Every cent of it. He was taking it to Los Angeles, probably to protect margins of stocks that had gone down."

"I s'pose you knew he would do that too," Jess said, with sarcasm.

"I didn't know, but I figured he might. Soon as I suspicioned Dawson was in it I wired a friend an' found out he had been playing the market an' losing money that he had to cover or lose a lot more."

"Well, it was a right good job you did, Bob. I'll say that," Judge Crisp praised.

"I had some help," the sheriff admitted modestly. "The day of the robbery I was out at Jacaton and saw Dawson drive to that old sheep-camp of his down by Three Willows Gulch. So I rode out next day an' found there had been only one man staying there. His war-bag was still in the cabin. I figured Dawson would go out there later to make sure his accomplice hadn't left any diary or memorandum or letter that would incriminate him. Well, he did just that. Then I felt right sure. All I had to do was to find the money he had stolen and it looked to me like he would have to get it to his brokers mighty soon. So I waited for him to move—a lot easier for me than to go hunting for it."

"Nick must be cold-blooded as a rattler," Allardyce mused. "Think of it, dragging this poor guy in to blow open the safe, knowin' all the time that he was gonna shoot him down like a coyote at the right moment. I never did like Nick, but that's about the worst ever!"

JESS WHITE made handsome acknowledgment. "Well, I sure hand it to you, Bob. You're good. What do you aim to do with the ten thousand reward?"

The sheriff's face lighted in a warm smile. "The reward? Oh, that belongs to Jane. Nick sold my mine for ten thousand. So we're quits. I've got to be movin' to dinner; she'll be looking for me. *Adios, gentlemen!*"

Their eyes followed him down the street.

"Like a horse that's been stove up—all through," quoted Allardyce, with sarcasm, obviously pointed at Jess White.

The little man glared at him. "H'mp! I s'pose you'll run that on me the balance of yore life. Funny how brains are in reverse of a man's size."

The battle was on between them, again.

Ten Years After

By
H. BEDFORD-
JONES

This interesting new series, dealing with events during the recent Legion convention, is by the author of "The Trail of Death" and "The Pirate of Algiers."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman



IF you know Hollock, it's hardly necessary to describe him. If, on the other hand, you merely heard of him through the press reports, that's different! You probably heard of him as a daredevil ace, a wild blade, who stayed in France after the war and adventured, who went to Morocco with the American flyers, and so forth. You'd not expect to see a quiet medium-sized chap, slightly bald, with a hearty grin and only a very level eye to betray his quality. But that was Holly—Commander Chauncey Levinfort Hollock, Legion of Honor, Order of Leopold, Croix de Guerre, etc., etc.

I hadn't seen Holly since the middle of the war. Now, ten years later, I walked into Paris and took a look around and felt like walking out again. The American Legion was on the way, some of it was here already, and Paris looked more American than French. I had not come for the convention, but because law work had broken me down, and the doctor said to clear out for six months or go under.

Two days of it and I felt better; dropping into bars, reviving my sad French, renewing old acquaintance, had a good effect. Besides the Legionaries, of course,

tourists were thick as fleas and American papers were sold on every street-corner, so there was no excuse for homesickness.

Hotel rooms being at a premium, I was stopping temporarily at a tourist joint in Rue Pierre Charron, where you got robbed handsomely with all the trimmings. At three one afternoon, I opened the door of my room, stepped out, and was just locking the door when the one across the corridor flew open and out came a woman.

"Oh!" she cried. "I've been robbed!"

"You would," I said, "if you're stopping here. I'm being robbed every day—"

"I mean robbed!" she exclaimed, her eyes snapping angrily at me. "My pocket-book's gone—I wasn't out of the room ten minutes—"

"H'm!" I said, looking her over. "You don't seem to be the sort to mislay a bag and think it was stolen—"

"If that's all you can do," she said, "I'll get the manager up here—"

"Don't do that," I told her. "He has beautiful whiskers but no sense. I've got no whiskers and a lot of sense. May I come in?"

"Do," she said, and stepped back into the room.



*After ten years,
these two were
now at clinches
—and what a
whale of a scrap
it was!*

I followed. She was as trim an American girl as I'd seen in a long time, with quick gray eyes, not too expensive a make-up, and a good healthy look about her. I liked her.

"Give me the lay, now," I said, and produced a card. "Jim Barnes, usually called Buddy; not particularly honest, being a lawyer, but so far out of jail. You have a maid?"

"No," she said, and smiled a little. "No. I've just taken this room for a day or two until I can get settled—I'm going to study. Well, I came up for lunch, left my bag on the dresser, and went into the bathroom there—left the door open, too; I was trying out a new lipstick."

"You heard nothing?"

"Not a sound. I did think I heard the door of my room close, but nothing else. When I came out, my bag was gone."

"In that case it's gone sure enough," I said. "A hotel rat got it."

She frowned suspiciously. "Are you trying to be funny?"

"Lord, no!" I said, and glanced at the open door. "But believe me, it'll do no good to holler to the manager. And this hotel outfit doesn't like mixed parties,

even with the door open. I know a fine little joint just around the corner—used to drop in there with the boys all the time when the war was on. Come along, have a drink, and I'll tell you what a hotel rat is. Are you on?"

This was a pretty good test of her. If she had any sense, she would know I was not taking the matter lightly, and would call my play. She called it.

"You're on," she said. "Come along."

We went downstairs, and I halted her at the desk, and called the manager, and pointed to her.

"M'sieur," I said, "will you have the kindness to tell me this lady's name?"

He looked blank behind his whiskers, but told me. It was Alice Vincent.

"What on earth did you do that fool trick for?" she demanded, when we got out on the street. "I was going to introduce myself in a minute—"

"Too long to wait," I said cheerfully. "Besides, I'm always doing fool tricks."

"That's evident," she retorted.

WE went on around to the little café. Quite a few people were occupying the leather settees along the walls, and

after the sunlight it was impossible to see anything. We took a table, shook hands with old Felix, the boss, and he poured the Rossi himself with the usual flourish. Then I got to business.

"A hotel rat," I said, "is the usual European name for a sneak-thief who operates in hotels—tourist hotels, by choice. This chap had his eye on you, and probably was hidden in the room when you came in. He simply took the bag and slid with it. He may be an employe of the hotel, may be a male or female rat—anyhow, the bag's gone."

She looked at me, and her gray eyes widened.

"But can't I do anything about it?" she demanded. "The police—"

"Not a thing," I said. "A reward, offered in the right channels, may get back your passport and other things; your money's gone."

JUST then I heard a man speaking behind me.

"Yeah, I know the feller," he said in English—a quiet, drawling voice that struck me like a shot. "Long, lanky red-haired bird with two fists and don't give a damn! Buddy Barnes he used to be—"

I turned around, and there was Holly behind us, all alone, grinning at me. I reached for his hand and threw out a chair for him.

"Alice," I said, "let me introduce Holly. Miss Vincent, this is Major or Commandant or General or something Hollock. He knows all the thieves in France, and probably he can get your bag back—"

"Oh, I heard you spouting about hotel rats," said Holly. "How much was in the bag, and what else?"

Alice Vincent laughed. "Only five hundred francs, but the bag was one I like, and my passport was in it."

"We'll get the bag and the passport back by tomorrow night," said Holly, and lifted his glass. "Here's how!"

Then, in mid-drink, he put out his left hand and clamped it on my knee. I saw him looking across the room, his gray eyes tense and alert.

"Watch your step, Buddy!" he said under his breath. "Don't stare—look at the man who just came in, there at the zinc! Salt down the face—then get outside, quick! See who speaks to him, or where he goes—we'll wait here. Move, durn you!"

I MOVED, because there was a certain urgency in Holly's fingers and voice that fired me. At the "zinc," as the little zinc-covered bar of a café is termed, stood a rather large, heavy-set man with black mustache, waxed at the points. He was a good-looking man, well dressed, with shaggy black brows that formed a little triangle over each eye. Something about him jogged my memory, but I could not place him.

As I was going out, he turned, saw me, and to my surprise reached out and caught my arm.

"Captain Barnes!" he exclaimed, and put out his hand. "Is it not? You do not remember the lieutenant of Spahis, and the fight we had behind the barn at Chateau Thibault? Ah, those days! Now we meet again—we can be friends, because we have fought, is it not?"

Genial, cordial, a hearty handshake—I remembered him now, and how we had enjoyed a good scrap over some girl. We shook hands and stepped out into the sunlight.

"Fancy meeting you!" I said, astonished. "You've fattened up a bit—I never did know your name—"

"Tellier, Jean Tellier," he returned, and clapped me on the back. "In business now, a negotiant, a broker! Come and see me sometime—here's my card. You are here for the American Legion reunion?"

I shook my head, explaining that I was here for my health, but would probably take in the convention. Through the doorway, I had one glimpse of Hollock's amazed stare, at seeing me thus intimate with the man.

"Weren't you *liaison* officer with our outfit?" I asked. "Sure! You speak English like a native, Tellier! Wish I could handle French with like fluency! I've forgotten most of what I ever knew. By the way," I added, on sheer impulse, "give me some advice, will you?"

"Anything but money!" he exclaimed with a hearty laugh. "What about?"

"A girl in my hotel got robbed," I said. "She's an American girl, and some hotel rat touched her this afternoon for her handbag. Wasn't much money in it, but she needs her passport and letter of credit and so forth—I'd like to see her get it back. She wants to go to the police, but there should be some better way than that."

"Hm!" he said. "One can always advertise—discreetly. What's her name?"

"Miss Vincent, Alice Vincent," I said. He got out pencil and paper, and made a note. Then he took my arm familiarly.

"I've one or two clients in what you'd call the underworld," he said. "It's just possible that I can manage it—I'll do my best, for your sake. What hotel?"

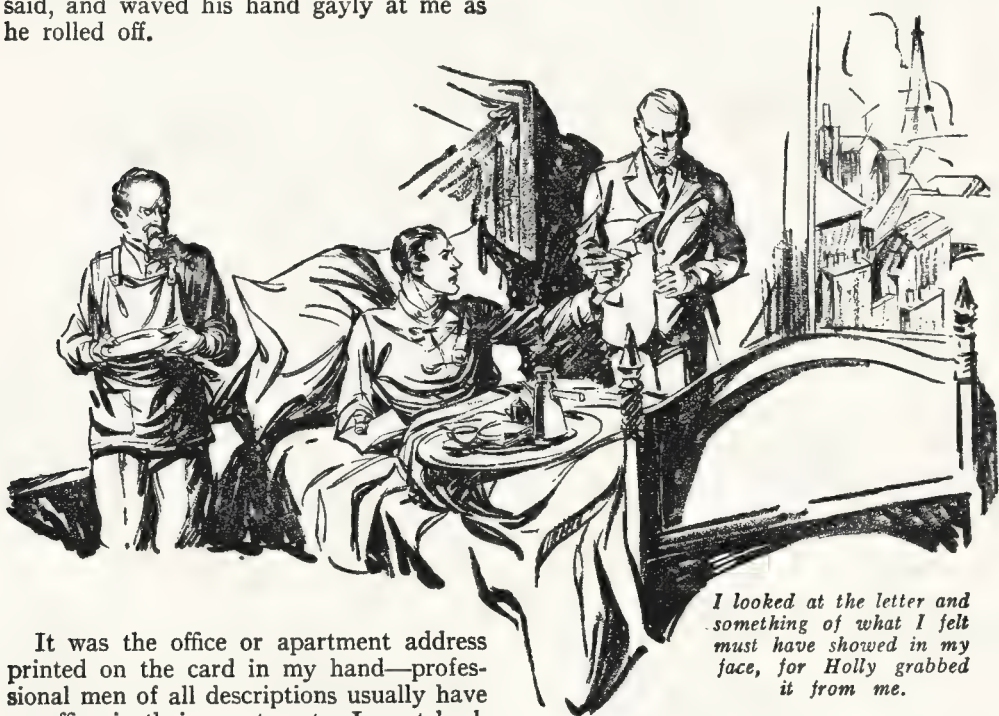
I told him, and he nodded. Then he swept off his hat and shook hands, and said farewell impressively. A taxicab was cruising along the curb; he hailed it, and got in. "Eighteen, bis, Cité Trevisé," he said, and waved his hand gayly at me as he rolled off.

chap—or was. What's so astonishing about it all, Holly?"

"Your blasted luck," he said with a groan. "I've been trying to run that beggar to earth for a year—and you do it in five minutes! Hm! I begin to see the reason now, though. Notice anything queer about his card?"

I took it. Beyond the name of Jean Emile Tellier and the address, it bore nothing.

"No registry number," explained Holly. "Every business man, however small, is numbered in the commercial register—part



I looked at the letter and something of what I felt must have showed in my face, for Holly grabbed it from me.

It was the office or apartment address printed on the card in my hand—professional men of all descriptions usually have an office in their apartment. I went back into the café.

HOLLOCK'S face was a study when I sauntered back, dropped into my chair again, and held out Tellier's card.

"He went there," I said. "Asked him for advice about Alice's bag, too—he thought he might get it back—he'd do his best."

Holly gasped. "You—my Lord!" he said, staring from the card to me. "And you got his address—well, I give up! He seemed to know you."

"He ought to," I returned, sipping my Rossi and grinning at the astonished Alice. "We swapped punches one day back in 1918 for a solid ten minutes before I knocked him cold. He's all muscle, that

of the government red tape. He must print his number on his commercial stationery and cards, with 'R. C.' or '*Registre du Commerce*'—and this card bears nothing. The government has no clue to friend Tellier."

"Well, what's the catch?" I demanded. "You connected with the government?"

"Not yet." He winked at me. "Tellier is just a general crook. I had a run-in with him during the war, another one a year or so ago, and it's lucky he didn't see me here or we'd have started something. Well, Miss Vincent, here's luck! Sorry I must run along—I've a business date in about ten minutes, and I'll have to hop. I'll drop in at the hotel—"

HE made a rapid, efficient and graceful get-away, leaving me with the impression that he was covering up a good deal. At any other time I'd have been hot on the scent, but at the moment, Hollock was a good deal less interesting than Alice Vincent.

We got well acquainted. She spoke good school French and had just arrived to spend a year studying interior decoration; she had some capital, but her own living to make. She didn't know a soul in Paris, but had some letters of introduction.

"If you have to study interior decorating in a school, you're out of luck," I told her, when we had exchanged mutual confidences, pedigrees and so forth. I pointed to a couple in one corner, who were kissing each other with the sublime unconcern manifested by Parisians in public. "There's the real kind! Anyhow, you can use your head for decorating, and get on to the tricks of the trade by experience—it's all in knowing how to graft."

She laughed. "You don't think much of decorators, Buddy?"

"I don't," I said, and laid down some brass to pay for the drinks. "Let's get going, Alice! Find us a taxi, see the sights, take in dinner and a show—shoot the works. What say?"

She said it, and we started out.

DURING the next two days I forgot Hollock, except occasionally; he called to see me, but I was gone. I liked Alice Vincent, she liked me, we both liked Paris, and we had one gay time, I'll tell the world! Sunday afternoon we went to a concert, and on the way to a little restaurant I knew of behind the Halles, I asked Alice to marry me.

She looked at me with a half-laughing, half-serious light in her gray eyes.

"Are you always this rapid, Buddy?"

"Yes," I said. "Whenever there's occasion for it. Until now, there hasn't been much occasion, Alice, and that's straight goods."

"Hm! That's why I like you—straight goods, Buddy."

"But—what about it?"

There was no laugh in her eyes now.

"Ask me again in six months, Buddy," she said. "If we both feel the same way about it then—all right. I want to marry a man, not a sex impulse."

The absolute common sense of this startled me, gave me a sharp insight into her

level-headed character. Just then the taxi stopped before our restaurant, and as she got out, I brought her fingers to my lips. "You win, Alice!" I said.

WE had lunched at the restaurant the previous day, so the proprietor came up and shook hands in the hospitable French fashion. I checked him, as he indicated a table.

"*Mon ami*," I said, "we are Americans, but we're not in a hurry. This young lady has just done me the honor to promise that she'll marry me in six months. Need I say more? I expect you to give us a dinner worthy of the occasion."

He promptly shook hands all over again, energetically, and his fat face beamed.

"The large room upstairs is empty—it is to you," he said. "I shall serve you myself. Only—consider this, my friends! Consider it, I beg of you! When you are there, look at the clock you'll see on the wall. Look at it silently, for the space of one full minute; then look at each other, and reflect how many of those minutes there are in six months."

When we got to the dining-room on the floor above, Alice looked at the clock, then at me, and if her cheeks were red, her gray eyes were dancing gayly.

"Wasn't that charmingly said? And he's right about it, too—but at the same time, I'm right."

"You are," I said. "It's six months, sink or swim, live or die!"

I was struggling with my chocolate and tough rolls next morning at ten, when into the room walked Hollock.

"You lazy devil—not up yet!" he said, staring at me. "Anyhow, I've found you."

By the way he flung his hat and stick down, I knew I had found trouble. And I was right.

"I've been busy," I said. "Sit down, Holly."

"And I've been busy too," he said.

"Not getting married, like me?"

"Huh?" He stared at me. "You—mean to say you're married?"

"No, but I will be in six months if I don't die."

"Oh!" he grinned. "That's a big if, old son! Alice Vincent, eh? Congratulations—she's about the finest I've seen in years. I'll say you've been busy! But why in the devil's name did you give her name to Tellier?"

*I saw the man hurl himself up
and at Hollock before the latter
could strike.*



"Why not?" I asked. He sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"You said you'd had a fight with him once. Over a woman!"

I nodded. "Forget the details, Holly—they've slipped me. I think he'd annoyed—"

"Listen here, Buddy," he said gravely. "I knew Tellier before you did—a full ten years back, when I was in the French escadrille, a kid. He had a nasty name among the nurses. He bothered a friend of mine and I went for him—both of us went to the hospital, but I licked him. He's a fighter, all right! Then last year I ran into him one day in Marseilles. He and two police officials had a frightened American woman in a taxicab. I intervened. The police were bogus—fakes. Tellier was blackmailing the woman. The three of them jumped me and got away, and I've never run him to earth since, until the other day. But I've heard a lot about him."

HE drew at his cigarette and gave me his case. I lighted up.

"Interesting, if true," I commented. "He's a crook?"

"The worst kind, and every kind. Without having proof, I believe most of the expert hotel rats are his men, between London and Nice. I suspect he has a finger in the junk business—"

"Junk?" I queried. The word was new since my time.

"Dope," said Holly impatiently. "They go into it heavily along the Riviera. I know one American magazine writer whose chief job is to propagate the use of snow dust and hashish among tourists down there. He's Tellier's man, I'm convinced. And back of all that, there's worse. If you've followed the papers, you've seen accounts of a number of suicides since last fall among American girls and women in France? Well—"

"My Lord!" I said, sitting up. "You don't mean he's a white slaver?"

"Of course. The institution's permanent over here."

I was appalled. "But look here! Not among Americans—the class of tourists—"

"Oh, climb down," said Holly. "Last summer, every ship that came over had a crowd of the younger set aboard, coming here or to Geneva for divorces. Don't argue—I'm telling you facts! They stay over here to have a good time on their alimony. All of 'em run with the fast set. Some get blackmailed, some get caught other ways—well, let's get off the subject. The point is—"

He hesitated; his eyes bit out at me.

"I've been asked to look into things," he said curtly. "You understand the situation with all these Legionaries flocking into Paris—most of 'em with some

money? You see how they could be robbed and worse than robbed?"

I nodded. The second A. E. F. was older than the first one had been in point of age, but it had more money and less discipline. A few dozen of its members, strayed or stolen, would not be missed.

"D'you mean to say," I asked slowly, "that you're somewhat in the position of official protector—"

"Unofficial," he corrected me. "Very unofficial, Buddy. But neither the French nor the American governments want to see these boys victimized, remember! Now I've got a string to the rotten devil whom I think is planning a wholesale raid—thanks to you and Alice Vincent. I don't know what I can do, what I will do, but do you want to come in on the party?"

"You bet I do!" I said, and gripped the hand he held out to me.

"Nobody I'd sooner have, Buddy," he said simply.

Just then a knock on the door. At my call, a hotel flunky came in with a letter for me—written in the lobby below. I tore it open, and two bits of paper came out. One was a note from Alice.

"I found this letter in my box," she wrote. "I'm going to get the bag at once—and thanks so much! See you at luncheon, Buddy."

I looked at the enclosed letter, and swallowed hard. Something of what I felt must have showed in my face, for Holly leaned over and grabbed it from me. Addressed to Alice, it was brief:

"If you'll come to 18, Bis, Cité Trevise, I shall be very glad to return your bag and contents. You can identify them, and I shall be happy to have been of service. Please call before eleven this morning.

"Yours very truly,
"J. E. TELLIER."

I was out of bed and sliding into my clothes in record time.

THE Cité Trevise was a crooked, narrow street a block long, behind the Rue de Trevise and not far from the Folies, that haunt beloved of tourists. The neighborhood might have been respectable, but it certainly was antique. We left our taxicab in the Rue de Provence, and walked into the street from the upper end. We were a silent pair, too. Hollock was deeply anxious, I could see, and I fully shared his disquietude.

"Tellier wouldn't be living here," he said suddenly, glancing down the long row of dingy buildings to the courtyard and the jog in the street. "It's probably an office—a business address."

"In which case," I said, "we should step into a reception room where somebody will be on guard. You haven't a gun, I suppose?"

"The less you have to do with guns, on other people's property, the better—in Paris," said Holly. He swung up the straight-handled ebony stick, slung by a thong to his wrist. "This is loaded—silent and safe. Let me go in first."

I had no objection. It was his game. We had both realized the same thing—that if Tellier were on the level, he had absolutely no business asking Alice Vincent to call for her bag. This damned him at once, but she had been too delighted and excited to see any danger. She had left the hotel a good ten minutes ahead of us.

"Police *agents* travel in pairs," said Holly, when we turned the jog in the street and drew near our number. "Step light on the stairs, and let me go in alone to have a look about—no use giving them warning."

There was sense to this. We came to the number we sought, turned in, and halted at the door of the concierge, who was a scowling old woman.

"Third, right," she growled, in reply to my question.

I followed Hollock up the stairs—narrow stairs, so pitch dark we could scarcely make out the landings. On the third floor, as we would call it in America, I halted and let Holly go on alone, then followed softly. Above, the door to the right of the stairs was half of glass; but there was an iron grille over the glass. Anyone inside had full view of whomever he was admitting. Apparently Hollock caused no suspicion by his tap, for I drew back as the door was opened.

"I have an appointment with M. Tellier," said Hollock in a low voice.

He stepped inside and the door closed, silently. It was not connected with a bell, as is usually the case. I came on up to it, but could not see inside—a white curtain hung behind the glass. Then, silently, the door opened in my face, and Hollock motioned me in. I found myself in a barely furnished office, two chairs and a flat-topped desk with an electric light hanging above it; sprawled behind

the door was a pasty-faced little man, unconscious. Holly softly and slowly shut the door, turned the key in the lock, and withdrew it—all without a sound. Then he stood, listening.

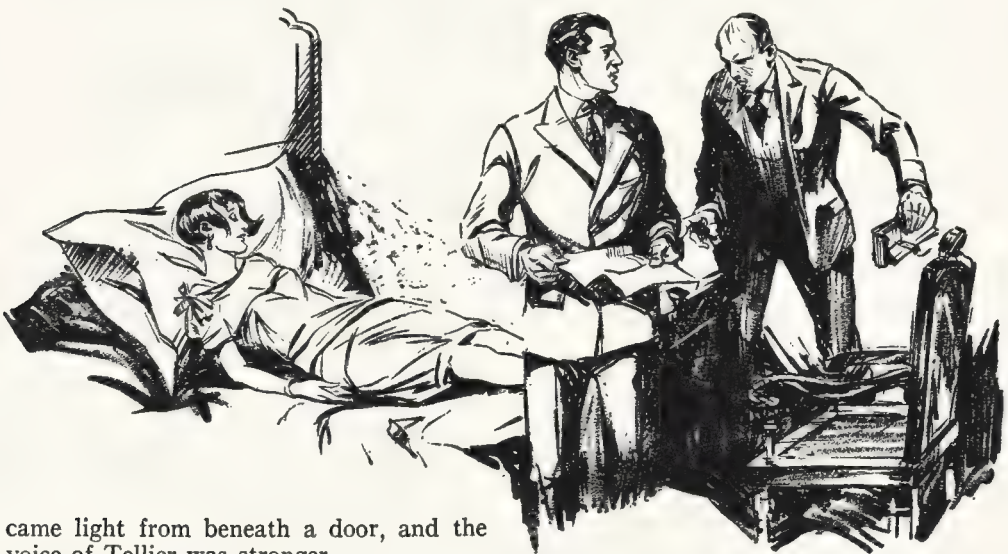
I heard it also; the voice of Tellier, muffled, the words indistinguishable, only a faint, very faint, sound. From the office went another door, opening into the next room. It stood slightly ajar. I went to it, pushed it open, and saw another barely furnished room, quite dark. The windows gained no light from outside, as a building had been put up almost against this one; from the opposite side of the second room

"It's delicious!" said Alice. "But isn't it rather bitter for Turkish coffee?"

Hollock leaned closer to the door.

"It has no sugar in it. Another lump, perhaps? And let me fill your cup again—that's better. Yes, I'm most happy to have been of service to you. I think Mr. Barnes is at your hotel? Or has he departed?"

Alice laughed. "Oh, he's there! I think he's just getting up about this time—he's a dreadfully lazy person! But he's nice. Tell me, please! Isn't there some way I can repay your kindness in this matter, Mr. Tellier?"



came light from beneath a door, and the voice of Tellier was stronger.

Hollock followed me as I sneaked across that second room, testing each board for creaks as I went. We paused near the door. The voice of Alice came clearly to us, and for a moment I felt a twinge of shame at eavesdropping.

"Yes, everything's all right—even the money! Mr. Tellier, I can't say how I thank you for getting this bag back for me—wont you let me pay—"

"Nonsense! It is a privilege to be of assistance to you," came Tellier's voice. "Say no more, I beg of you—will you have sugar in your coffee?"

I looked at Holly, and he looked at me with a wry grimace, in the dim light from the office. Things began to appear rather bad—for us.

"This is quite good coffee," said Tellier. "Real Turkish—I get it from a dealer in the Chaussee d'Antin. He puts no ground peanuts in it, as most do."

"Holy smoke! That must have jumped from Tellier's pocket, in the scuffle!" he cried.

Tellier laughed in turn. "Nothing to repay—nothing, I assure you! But wait—there's something you could do for some friends of mine, if you would. The Marquise de Grammont, a charming lady! She's giving a tea and a little entertainment for a number of the American Legion boys on Saturday night—her house in Passy. She lost her only son in the war—he was interpreter with one of your brigades."

"Yes?" inquired Alice, and I thought her voice sounded a little strange. Hollock reached out and caught my arm, and held it.

"Yes," went on Tellier. "Unfortunately, none of the Marquise's friends speak English. She was asking me yesterday whether I knew any American lady who might help

her make her guests feel at their ease—
you comprehend—”

Holly's fingers tightened on my arm, and no wonder. I suppose every real marquise—and all the bogus ones—in France speaks English perfectly. Besides, this was one of the greatest names in French history, and if the lady had any right to it—but what was the use of figuring things out? Tellier was lying, and that was the long and short of it. Legionaries, eh? No doubt that Holly was on the right track!

“Why, I'd be glad!” said Alice, but rather faintly. The timbre of her voice startled me, it was so strange. “If I'd be of any help, yes! I—I feel rather stifled, Mr. Tellier—perhaps I'd better—”

A chair scraped back. “I'll open this door—it's a bit close in here, eh? Well, well, that'll be most kind of you, Miss Vincent! There, lean back in that chair—you'll be quite all right in a moment—”

SILENCE followed—a rather long and uneasy silence. Holly leaned over, his lips at my ear.

“I don't like this, Buddy. Something's up in there. Hang on a bit until I tie up that chap outside—didn't hit him hard enough.”

He tiptoed away toward the office. He had just reached its doorway when the door before me opened a trifle and Tellier's voice leaped out at me. He was no doubt calling at his man.

“Achille! Go down and bring up the car. Then come and help me here.”

To my astonishment, a reply came from the office. Holly had been too slow.

“*Oui, m'sieur—ah! Nom du diable!*”

And looking back at the lighted office, I saw the man there hurl himself up and at Hollock before the latter could strike him. On this, I jumped at the door ahead of me and flung it open.

I had a sharp, instantaneous glimpse of the lighted room. A door stood open on the other side. Alice lay in a chair, her eyes closed. Facing me, beside a table littered with coffee-things, stood Tellier. His dark eyes were flaming at me from beneath those triangular shaggy brows of his.

No words passed between us—none were needed. I went for him; his hand moved; a small glass sugar-bowl struck me between the eyes and sent me down like a shot.

It was a nasty crack; for a moment I was swimming in a sea of stars and moons, and in this moment Hollock was through

the door, over me, and grappling with the big Frenchman. When I groggily pulled myself to one knee, they were going up and down the room like two locked terriers in a dog-pit. The table went over on top of me and sent me sprawling again. After ten years, these two were now at clinches—and they made the most of the opportunity. And what a whale of a scrap it was!

“Got you now—blast your dirty soul!” growled Hollock, drove in a smashing blow, and went reeling under another like unto it.

Dimly it beat in upon me how here was something more than the mere hatred of two men culminating over long years. More, much more! Here was Tellier, organizer of all evil, slimed with monstrous crimes, carrying on a dark and secret campaign, suddenly unmasked and caught in the very act, faced with retribution; here was Hollock, himself almost unprepared, running his prey to earth by good luck, madly determined to end it all at one stroke. And how they fought—the one, for escape; the other, for victory!

You'll seldom find a slugging Frenchman, but Tellier was one of the few. When the two of them got over their first wild scramble, they went all over the room in a furious mêlée, and then settled down to work. Hollock was the better boxer, but Tellier had a kick like a mule in each fist. Chairs went crashing, blows thudded home, curses panted hotly—and then Tellier fetched up against the wall with a full-bodied smash that brought down a rain of plaster.

This must have jarred him into realizing his danger, for he ducked Holly's next crack, got home a vicious short-arm jab to the belt, and then was gone. I was struggling to my feet, trying to reach him—but too late. He darted to the electric switch, hand sliding into his pocket, and the room went black at the click. A spurt of fire, the deafening slam of a pistol, and then the slam of a door and the rasp of a bolt shot home. “Damn it!” said Hollock's voice hoarsely.

I was at the switch by now, and turned it. Tellier had slipped through the farther door, and one try showed we could not break it down. He was gone. I turned and stared at Holly.

“Hit?”

“No. Damn it, he's foxed us! Better get out of this. You get her waked up. I'll go find a taxi and calm down any fuss this row may have caused below.”

He was gone, straightening his torn and rumpled clothes as he went.

I did my best to fetch Alice around, but it was no use; she was drugged to sleep—that cursed coffee had done it. Tellier's purpose remained obscure; the obvious implication was something to shrink from.

So, pocketing her bag and a notebook beside it on the floor, I picked up my hat and then lifted her in my arms. In the outer office, the luckless guard was huddled in a corner, this time properly knocked out. I shut the door behind me, and felt my way down the dark stairs.

Holly was bringing up a taxi to the door. The one shot had drawn no attention—Paris is an up-to-date city in this respect.

HOLLOCK had an apartment in the Rue de Maubeuge, close by, and we went directly there. The spectacle of two men bringing home an unconscious woman would make any English or American city sit up and take notice; but people mind their own affairs in Paris. True, the concierge came out with a blank stare, but Holly gave him a word and had him telephone for a doctor. Then we went on up.

We put Alice Vincent on the bed—she seemed quite all right, beyond her drugged state—and went into the salon. Hollock was badly hit; he was furious at himself for having missed Tellier after all.

"Don't take it so hard," I said. "We know that your surmises were right; he's out to trim the convention boys. Further, we've got a good line on him. You saw how quickly that drug worked—Alice was dead to the world in no time. He won't know that we overheard him talking to her, and will be pretty sure she won't remember details of what he said."

Hollock gave me a stare, lighted a cigarette, and whistled thoughtfully.

"Believe you're right, Buddy," he said. "You mean, about Marquise de Grammont and Saturday night, eh? House in Passy—hm! There's a real Duchesse de Grammont, by the way, but she lives elsewhere. This party begins to look promising—"

The doctor arrived, and as he was a gentleman of discretion, we told him what had happened to Alice. He looked her over.

"Drugged? Yes; she is quite all right, however. Breathing is very light—she'll wake up in an hour or less. There's absolutely nothing to worry about, gentlemen."

"So that's that," said Hollock, when he had bowed him out. "What're you doing there?"

I was getting Alice's bag out of my pocket. He sniffed at sight of it.

"That bag has caused the whole thing!" he growled. "Naturally, Tellier only had to send word around among the hotel rats, to get it with its contents intact. What's that?"

I had pulled out the small green morocco notebook.

"It was on the floor with the bag," I said, and opened it. The notebook seemed almost unused. In fact, I saw writing on only two pages. But the first of those pages drew a sharp exclamation from me.

"For the love of Mike— Look here, Holly!"

He craned over my shoulder and read the words written in French:

"Flowers, linen, silver, for Gabrielle—23 Rue de l'Assomption."

"Holy smoke! That must have jumped from Tellier's pocket in the scuffle!" he cried. "And there's the address of our fake marquise—and a clue to her real name—"

I had turned to the other written page. On this were three names:

Mark F. Wilberforce

T. Jennings Humphry

F. C. Severance.

And the note: "*Proposed by Larned.*"

A laugh burst from Hollock—an excited yet amused laugh, as he pointed to the note.

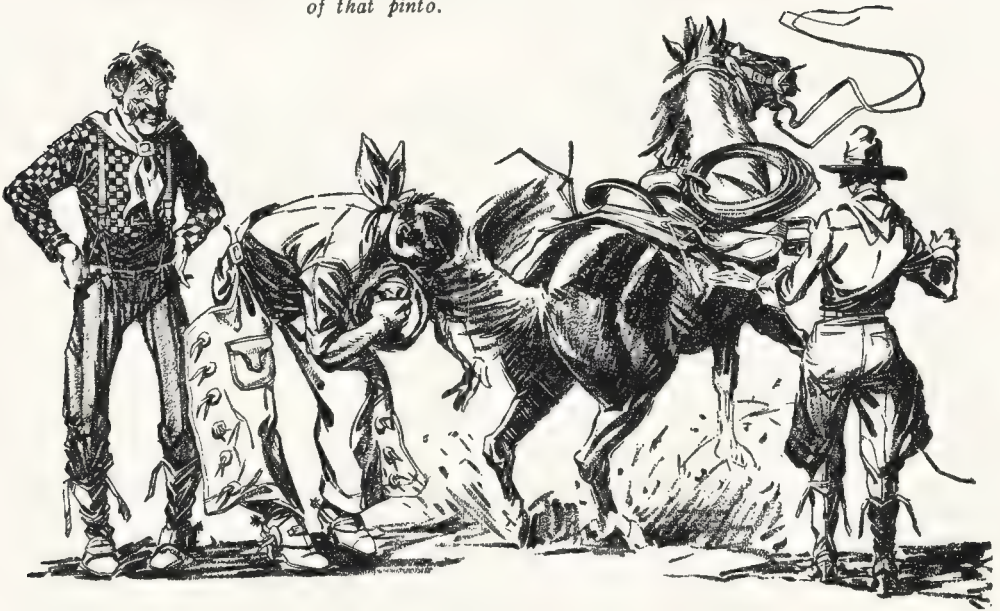
"Do you get it, Buddy? Three suckers, three candidates for Tellier's American Fish Commission—proposed by Larned! Who's Larned? He's one of our black sheep, by gosh! He's one of Tellier's dirty sneaks! We'll land him, all right—we'll find out about him. And now we've got the dope on the marquise and her address—so long, Buddy! I'm going out to start some investigating. See you later. Make yourself at home."

He was gone, bursting with eagerness, taking the notebook with him. He was already thinking less of our failure to catch Tellier than of the campaign ahead.

I lighted a cigarette; waited for Alice to come around. The first round with Tellier was over, and I was satisfied. I had no ten-year-old feud to settle. All I cared about was Alice Vincent—and the next six months!

The efforts of Hollock and Barnes to outwit the wily Tellier—as recounted in the next, the January, issue—make a lively story.

*"Miss Burcken-bridle," I hear him say to the south side
of that pinto.*



Parson Pat's Predicament

By

LEMUEL DE BRA

*The joyous saga of a cowpuncher
very much in love and very much
in trouble, by the author of "Call
off the Wild" and other good ones.*

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

RIGHT off I want to say that we never meant no disrespect when we gave Pat the brand o' "Parson." The day he signed up with the Happy Valley outfit I was the one who showed him his stall; and I found out that for all his meek ways and melancholy looks he was a hundred percent A-1 thoroughbred.

"Where you been ridin' herd?" I asks him as he picks up his saddle and follers me into the bunk-house.

"Mister," he says, lookin' at me with them sad eyes o' his'n that would make a jackrabbit laugh, "if it's any o' yore damn' business, I been ridin' all over hell an' half o' Mexico." Then he throws his hat on the floor and hangs up his saddle, which same assures me that Pat is a real gentleman.

And he was. At fust we had to laugh every time we looked at his doleful face with them mournful eyes and that lock o' hair that always hung down over his forehead; but afore spring round-up was half over we learned that the little cuss could outride and outwork any of us.

At that, the Parson wasn't so little. He'd 'a' measured close to six feet if his danged legs hadn't gone so far outa the way to get to his socks; and I reckon he'd 'a' dressed a hundred and sixty pounds—which is all any self-respectin' cowpony wants to pack around.

Even when we was loafin' in camp, Pat could take the lead in everything. He knowed more songs than any puncher that ever drifted out our way; and what's more he knowed three different tunes. It sure

was entertainin' to see Pat with his mouth wide open and that bang of hair droopin' over his mournful eyes while his deep voice rolled out something like:

"Oh, my old gray bronc', he's in the back stall;
He aint been fed or watered, since
a-w-a-y-y-y last fall."

The only trouble was that all of them three tunes Pat had learned was so durned sad and tearful. Pecos Charley said they was all hymns and that back in Texas they never sang them except at funerals. Right off, and without meanin' any disrespect either to Pat or to preachers, the boys branded our new hand "Parson."

WELL, one day along to'rds the tail-end of the calf round-up me and Parson Pat got word that Herb Walters, the owner of Happy Valley ranch, wanted to see us in his office. We didn't find him there, so sat down to wait; and right off the Parson spots a photograph that Herb has on the top of his desk between his old forty-fives. Pat gazes sadly at that picture for at least five minutes; then he asks me who it is, and I tell him it's a niece of Herb's, name of Miss Millie Burckenhalter.

"You ever seen the lady?" Pat asks.

"Seen her? Why I knowed Millie ever since she was knee-high to a gnat! She's an orphan, and her Uncle Herb has just about raised her. She's in New York now with her aunt, Herb's sister."

Parson Pat gazes at Millie's picture another minute; then he asks: "How long ago was that there picture took?"

"Last Christmas," I tells him, wonderin' at his durned curiosity.

"Jim," says Pat solemnly, "out here where men are men—an' women are as scarce as custard pies—I aint had much ex-peer-ience with the sleeker sex; but I'm tellin' you right out straight that if this here Miss Millie Buckinghalter—"

"Burckenhalter," I corrects him, knowin' Millie was always touchy about her name.

"My mistake," says Pat. "What I'm sayin' is that if this young lady comes up to her prospectus, then I sure would like to meet her an'—"

"Meet who?" growls the voice of Herb Walters from the door behind Pat. And I'd better tell you right off that Happy Valley ranch was named for the valley and not for its owner. Herb Walters is a square man, and every puncher on the

place would fight to the last breath for him; but he's usually about as good-natured as an old he-bear with his hide full of bees. "You referrin' to my niece?" goes on Herb, stumpin' across the floor to his desk. "Well, let me tell you: I aint educated Millie for the edification o' any bean-eatin', gun-totin', rum-swizzlin' cow-puncher; an' the fust damn' *hombre* that I catch makin' calf-eyes at Millie, I'm goin' to shoot his liver out an' then *kill it with a club*. An' don't you forget I said it!"

Parson Pat looks surprised for a second; then he reaches for his tobacco sack.

"Mister Walters," he says, while Herb still glares at him, "I sure aint never goin' to forget that you said that."

"All right!" snaps Herb, and turns to his desk, not gettin' just how Parson Pat meant that. If Herb had knowed Parson Pat as well as I did by that time, he never would 'a' talked to Pat that way; and right off I seen trouble ahead. That is, I seen trouble comin' if I had got the right inference from the boss's words.

"Herb," I speaks up, "do you mean that Millie is comin' back to Happy Valley?"

"Yes," says Herb.

"Whoop-e-e!" I lets out a yell. "That's the best news—"

"Jim," butts in the boss, and I see a dreamy look in his eyes as he gazes at his niece's picture, "I've found out I can get Millie out of the West; but I'm damned if I can get the West out of Millie! She claims she's not well, an' says she wants to come to Happy Valley an' paint pictures; but I can tell from her letters that it's just plain homesickness. Well, I'm glad of it. I allus had a hunch she'd be happier out here than in the big cities; an' she'll sure brighten up this place. That's what I wanted to see you about Jim. I'm drivin' to town today to meet Millie an' wont be back until day after tomorrer. I want you to stay around an' look after things."

HE lines up a job that me and the Parson are to do while he's gone; and pretty soon me and Pat are ridin' over to'rds Silver Springs. I'm wonderin' what's in the Parson's mind when he up and says:

"Jim, when this here Miss Millie Brokenhalter—"

"Burckenhalter," I corrects him severely.

"My mistake," the Parson apologizes.

"When she gets here, I want you see to it that I get a *ree*-duction."

"Sure I'll interduce you," I tells him. "But let me tell you something." And then I starts in on a lecture on how Herb Walters feels about his niece and how Herb aint no man to be triflin' with; and right when I think the Parson is takin' in my talk real serious, he busts out with one of his danged songs!

And all that day the Parson didn't mention Millie again; but next mornin' he shows up at feedin' time with that lock missin' off his sad eyes, and his hair plastered down slick with vaseline—and I knowed the struggle was on.

MILLIE and her Uncle Herb got in late on a Thursday night. Bright and early next mornin' while me and the Parson and several of the boys were saddlin' up down at the south corral I seen her breezin' around the ranch on a little pinto she used to ride before she went to live with her aunt in New York. Pretty soon she spots us and with a yell she comes a-runnin'. Doggone it, she was a picture—flyin' along on that pinto just like she belonged there—and I guess she did. As the pinto digs his hind feet to a slidin' stop, Millie swings off and hops right up to me.

"Jim!" she cries. "Dear old Jim!" And dang my ears if she don't rope my neck with her hands and pull my head down and give me a smack right on my leathery old cheek. "I'm so glad to get back and see you-all!" she sings out, and then spots Beany Hampton. "Hello, you Beany!" Millie shouts, and grabs Beany by the hand.

Well, right quick the boys line up in a sort of horseshoe formation for the grand reunion; and I see that the Parson is on the other side of Millie at the far end of the line. He's gazin' at Millie like a calf lookin' at a pan of milk and he's so doggone excited he aint got sense enough to take off his hat, so I crosses over and jabs him in the washboard.

"Yank off yore haircase, you danged idiot!" I whispers. "And *ree*-member—it aint *Broken*—; it aint *Bucking*—; it's *Burcken-halter*!"

Well, I don't know if he hears me, for he don't say a word, just looks at Millie. And in a minute she has waltzed up to 'rd the Parson and is lookin' at him like she's tryin' to remember his name.

"Millie," I speaks up, "this is our new hand—and a durned good one—name of Parson Pat."

Millie nods quick, like a bird, and gives the Parson one o' her "Merry Christmas" smiles; and just then two things happen at once. *Free*-cisely as the Parson yanks off his haircase and makes a grand bow, that danged pinto shies away from one o' the boys and sidles in between the Parson and Millie.

Now, Millie aint the kind to hurt no one's feelin's; but she's busy just then with that nervous pinto, and besides, she thinks the interduction is over. So she don't get the *ree*-dicolous picture o' the Parson all doubled up, holdin' his haircase over his heart, the sun shinin' on the vaseline in his hair, while he's mumblin' something to the south side o' that dumb and unap*pre*-ciating pinto!

"Miss *Burcken-bridle*," I hear him say—but he don't say no more. He aint in no position to know what a fool he's makin' o' hisself; but he's in a damn' good position to get a swift kick, and I sure gives it to him proper. He grunts, straightens up, sees what he's been doin', and sees the boys laughin' at him. And right then a look comes into the Parson's eyes that I don't ever want to see again. I'm a heap *ree*-lieved when nothin' happens right then, and Millie, wavin' her hand at us, rides off again.

"Pat," I says kindly-like, when the boys has drifted away, "now that you have met the young lady—and her pinto—I'll remind you for the last time that her name is *Burcken-halter*. You hear?"

"That's exactly what I said!"

"You're a liar," I tells him. "You said *Burcken-bridle*!"

"My mistake," growls Pat—but they aint no apology in his voice.

"You don't 'pear to care much," I says, watchin' his face.

"I don't give a damn," he spits out—just like that. "Any *fee*-male that prefers the *attentions* of a dumb brute to the *intentions* of a gentleman can't kick none if he don't get her brand right; an' what's more she aint been properly *cultured* an' needs—"

"Wait a minute!" I cuts in. "Yore talk is comin' in herds. You'll have to snow a little—so I can get the drift. But if you say that Miss—"

"What I'm sayin' is that no woman, however young an' purty, can make a fool

out o' me. Your friend, Miss Millie What's-her-name tried it—an' she needs a lesson. I'm goin' to give it to her. I aint had much *expeer*-ience with women but I've had enough to know that he who hesitates is bossed, so I aint hesitatin'. In less time than it takes to break a hand-raised colt I'm goin' to have that filly eatin' hay out o' my hand!" And he turns quick and walks off to where his bronc' is hitched; and before I can get my talk-box to workin' the Parson is in the saddle dog-trottin' down the trail and a-singin':

"—For it's here I've drowned six purty young maidens;
An' you the seventh shall be—"

Millie's pretty face is real serious, there's a smile in her eyes.

"He's a durned good puncher," I answers, purtendin' I haven't any idee what it's all about. "Aint been botherin' you none, has he?"

"Oh, no!" Millie answers right off. "I like him. I think he's very—well—interesting. But he says the queerest things. I was sketching Silver Springs the other day when he rode up, and we got to talkin'. First thing I knew he was asking me as a special, a *very* special, favor, to let him call me by my first name!"

"A durned good idee!" I blurts out, not thinkin'. "He has a lot of difficulty gettin' on speakin' terms with vore last name."



"You're doing splendidly," she tells him; "but I want to try a new pose."

WELL, the Parson herded pretty much by hisself for several days, and when I'd try to get a word out of him of nights he'd just give me an ugly grunt—like it was all my fault he'd fouled his rope in his first throw at Millie's affections. Then I had work that took me away from the ranch for almost a week and I sort o' forgot the affair; but the first day I was back I was reminded of it by Millie, herself.

"Jim," she says, when we're alone by the windmill where I'm fixin' a leaky trough, "what sort of a kid is that new hand—Parson Pat?"

I looks up quick; and I see that while

"Oh!" Millie tosses her bobbed mane just like the thoroughbred she is. "Well, it was my daddy's name and it suits me! But wait, Jim, until I tell you the rest! He said his last name was O'Dowd and he asked me if I liked it. Of course, I told him I did. Then he grins just like a lovesick kid and says: 'Well, Millie, since you like my name—you *can* have it!'"

Well, I don't know what to say to that; but I'm thinkin' that the Parson sure is playin' his hand like they was all aces.

"Jim," Millie goes on after a minute, "the Parson thinks too much of himself. I'm going to give him a lesson—providing you think it wouldn't be wrong."

"You couldn't ever do nothin' that I'd think was wrong," I tells her and means it.

"I know it, Jim. That's why I'm tellin' you first. Jim, do you suppose I could make that conceited kid fall in love with me?"

Well, right there I drops my pipe-wrench and gets out the makin's.

"Could you?" I blurts out. "Why, dog-gone it, Millie—in less time than it takes to break a hand-raised colt you can have that conceited jassack eatin' hay out of yore hand—with salt on it!"

Millie chuckles at that. "And—and you think it would be all right for me—"

"Pree-zactly the thing to do!" I declares—and then I see where I'm headin' and I reins up short. "But Millie—s'posin' you fall in love with the Parson!"

"Why, Jim, you silly!" she scolds me. "Do you think I'd be so foolish?"

"Well, it durned sure wouldn't be the fust time a pretty girl like you with a flock o' book-learnin' hitched up with a homely and—"

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way!" Millie cuts in quick. "What I meant was that I'm not going to get married for—well, years and years. So don't worry about me! Now I heard Uncle Herb say there was a lot of work to be done around the ranch. Maybe you can manage to have him keep the Parson here on that work. And I have another scheme. I'm going to tell the Parson he's a perfect picture of the real Western cowboy and that I want to do him in oil to be hung in my room."

"A bright idee," I says. "I'd like to see him done in hot grease and hung on a barbwire fence. You can count on Jim Tulliver for all the help you want. And fust off, I'll see that he's given work clost around the ranch."

Well, Millie thanks me, swears me to solemn and eternal secrecy, and rides back to the ranch-house.

TWO days later the fun begins. Pecos Charley ropes me as I'm headin' for the feedin' stall at noon.

"Jim," he says, "if you want to see a puffect example of a man bein' in heaven, with both feet—an' he aint even dead yet—just come with me!"

I follow him around to the north side of the house where there's a peculiar up-thrust o' rock about ten feet in diameter and mebbe fifteen feet high. There usta

be a spring at the base, but it's been dry for years.

Right by the house I see Millie. She's got a little stand in front of her, and is holdin' a funny-shaped board with daubs o' paint on it. She makes a dab at the stand, then looks up to'rd that rock—and right then I see something the likes o' which I aint seen since that crazy movie outfit was here "shootin' Westerns."

Over by the rock, standin' where that spring usta be, is something with colors enough to be a cross between a Gila monster and a winter sunset. It's got on *white* wool chaps, a *dove-gray* hat with a rattlesnake band, a *blue* bandanna, *yellow* gloves with wide gauntlets glistenin' with silver, a *cream-colored* buckskin vest with big pearl buttons, a *purple* shirt with *pink* sleeve-holders, and a bright *green* sash like a greaser gent wears when he wants to show off.

"Jim," whispers Pecos Charley, "do you think we ought to kill it, or catch it alive an' try to raise the animile?"

At that, Millie looks around. She smiles, then puts a finger to her lips. Layin' down her brush and paint-board, she trots up to our little playmate, Parson Pat.

"You're doing splendidly," she tells him, "but I want to try a new pose." And doggone me if she don't put her hand under his chin and turn his head fust one way and then another while the Parson's face gets red enough to stampede a tame herd and he keeps shiftn' his feet like his boots was hurtin' him. Then she says something I don't hear, and when she trots back to her stand, there's the Parson with his left hand shadin' his eyes while in his right is one o' Herb's old forty-fives.

"Hell an' breakfast!" whispers Pecos Charley. "Le's *vamoose* afore that danged old cannon goes off!"

"Mebbe we'd better take that away from him afore he hurts hisself," I says. And then Millie gives me a friendly frown and waves for us to move on—which we do, *pronto*.

WELL, that's the way things go on for a couple o' weeks. We see the Parson rigged out in the durndest outfits any human ever wore—and Millie posin' him in different spots around the ranch while she paints his picture. Once I seen him wearin' a battered old sombrero, a brown

shirt, a wide leather belt, dingy old leather chaps, and two big guns hangin' low on his bow-legs—and sportin' more shiny conchas than a toad has warts. It was enough to make a lizard laugh. Herb cussed at the way Millie was takin' up the time of one of his best men, but Millie allus did have her own way around the ranch, so finally Herb gave it up.

ABOUT that time we boys began to notice that the Parson wasn't singin' any more.

I'm wonderin' about that when one day me and the Parson is combin' Yellow Gulch cañon for strays. At noon we're sittin' out a smoke, but the Parson isn't sayin' a word, just watchin' me like he's wonderin' if I'm a honest man or a hoss-thief. Then, all of a sudden, he up and says:

"Jim, I'm in love."

"Are you?" I says, sarcastic-like. "I knowed they was something ailin' you, but I figgered it was either cooties or colic."

"Don't make fun, Jim," the Parson pleads, lookin' at me with them sad eyes. "It aint no laughin' matter. It's awful."

"You look like it," I tells him.

"I can't help it," the Parson says, shakin' his head. "I'm walked down, creased, and roped for good. And I got to ask yore help. I love Millie—"

"Miss *Burckenhalter*, you mean," I cuts in severely.

"Her name aint goin' to be that much longer," declares Pat solemnly. "It's goin' to be Mrs. Pat O'Dowd. I'm just a penniless puncher, but she's—"

Well, I have to laugh at that; and then, all of a sudden, I find myself gettin' sorry for the pore devil. After all, Pat is a durned good kid—even if he does take hisself so blamed serious. Besides, I been in love myself and I know how doggone all-gone a feller feels. It's wusser'n a four-way cross between the mumps, the measles, snake-bite, and *dee-lirium tremens* complicated by inherited and incurable insanity.

So, while I don't intend to butt into Millie's game, I finally gets soft and asks the Parson what he wants me to do.

"Jim," he says, "I want you to tell me how I can make Millie ride to my gait. At fust, she was as nice as pie all over sugar and ice cream; but lately she don't pay no more attention to me than she would to a one-legged Papago Indian."

Uh-huh! I'm sayin' to myself—for I'm

thinkin'. From what Pat says, Millie either is tired of her little game, or she sees what she has done to pore Pat and is sorry. In either case, it seems to me the best thing is to kid Pat until he gets over it.

"I don't know the fust thing about makin' love to women," I tells him; "but I'll *free*-sent your case to the boys tonight and mebbe we—"

Right there the Parson jumps up and busts open his can o' cuss-words.

"Jim Tulliver!" he says, "I'm a-trustin' you with my secret! If I find out that you have told any o' them spotted-livered sons o' biscuits—"

"Hold up!" I cuts in. "You're draggin' yore rope. You asked me for help. I'm a-goin' to give it; but yore case is real *see*-rious and calls for a consultation. I'll have some advice for you tomorrer. Just now I'm ridin'!"

Well, that night the bulldoggin' begins! Fust off, Beany Hampton chassés out o' the bunk-house and waltzes over to where the Parson is settin' at the end o' the porch lookin' like he'd lost his last friend and some skunk had stole his saddle.

"Parson," says Beany, shovin' something into the Parson's hand; "this is for you. I heerd you was in real trouble an' I dug this up right away. If it don't help you, let me know an' mebbe I can find something worse."

The Parson unwraps the package and finds a bottle o' some black stuff. Before he has sense enough to think, he reads aloud: "*Huddledam's Famous Tonic for All Heart Troubles.*"

Beany saved hisself by a quick dodge. As he *vamoosed* around the corner, the bottle smashed against the bunk-house.

Well, that's the way the raggin' goes on—the boys tossin' the Parson a lot o' wise cracks and him a-settin' there just oozin' gloom and silence. And finally, Pecos Charley calls me to one side.

"Jim," he says, "the only thing that will *ree*-lieve the Parson's ailment is for him to go on a he-man, rip-snortin', hell-bustin' drunk. Moreover, it would make Millie have more respect for him. He's too durned tame for a woman. Hist'ry learns us that women likes 'em wild. They will bite the hand that feeds 'em; and go clean through hell to *feed the hand that bites 'em*. So—"

"Stop!" I says. "You know durned well the Parson don't drink; and you

know durned well you aint no authority on the curious and contrary customs o' the weaker sex; but at that, you give me a helluva idee! Beany knows how to keep a secret, so get him and we'll have war-talk."

Well, we not only agreed on a plan, but we decided that I was to give the Parson my advice at once. So we pass around the word for the other boys to fade, and I chassés over to where Parson Pat is still settin' on the porch.

Right off, Pat balks. He suspects that it's all a put-up job—which same it sure is; but finally I get him thinkin' my way and after awhile he just shoves his head in the nose-bag and goes it blind.

"Jim Tulliver," he says, like he's goin' to cry on my shoulder, "you're a real friend! I never would 'a' thought o' that scheme!"

"I like you and hope you do well," I tells him: "But *ree*-member—I aint assumin' no responsibility if you don't!"

"Don't you worry about me missin' this throw!" he says quick. "I know just how to handle yore scheme an' I'm startin' the show tomorrer!"

Well, he musta played his hand strong, for the very next night Millie comes to me with her pretty face all *see*-rious. After talkin' about a lot o' things that aint on her mind a-tall she finally gets around to what is.

"Jim," she says quietly, "I promised Parson Pat I wouldn't mention this to Uncle Herb; but there was nothing said about me discussing it with you. So I'm going to ask you several questions and I want the plain truth. First, just how much do you know about that man you call the Parson?"

Of course I opens my eyes and my talk-box and looks at Millie like I'm knocked clean outa the saddle.

"Why—why, I don't know nothin'—'cept that he's a nice young man with a wonderful future—"

"Yes!" Millie cuts in; "he's got a wonderful future—*behind him!* Jim, if half of what Parson Pat has told me is true, he should be in prison—or hung."

"Millie!" I starts pitchin'. "What—"

"Oh, I know it's terrible," Millie cuts in. "Imagine how I felt when he confided to me that he has served time in prison for train robberv'!"

"It—it aint true! Why—"

"And he says he's wanted in six states

for six different killings. He says he is sorry he has ever taken human life, but that the impulse comes over him at times and he can't help it."

"I've heard o' men like that, Millie," I says soberly. "But to think of our little Parson bein' a killer! A train robber!"

"He says the train robberies were just kid pranks, that he always gave away all the money he stole. And—he says that meeting me has made him see things differently and that he wants to reform. He told me that when he was just a boy his father was murdered by Indians and his mother taken captive and that he has never before known a—a good woman. He says that he want's me to help him live down his terrible past. And he is so serious that he has about convinced me that there is some truth in what he is telling about himself. Jim, do you know where he worked just before he came to Happy Valley?"

"I asked him where he'd been ridin' herd; and I recollect now he said he'd been all over a certain place hotter'n the Sunken Desert—and half o' Mexico."

Millie shook her head sadly. "That's about what he told me. Jim, I'm astounded—and disappointed. Parson Pat certainly doesn't look like—like that sort of man. He has a *good* face. And, Jim, for all his nonsense, he's got more *brains* than any man I have ever met."

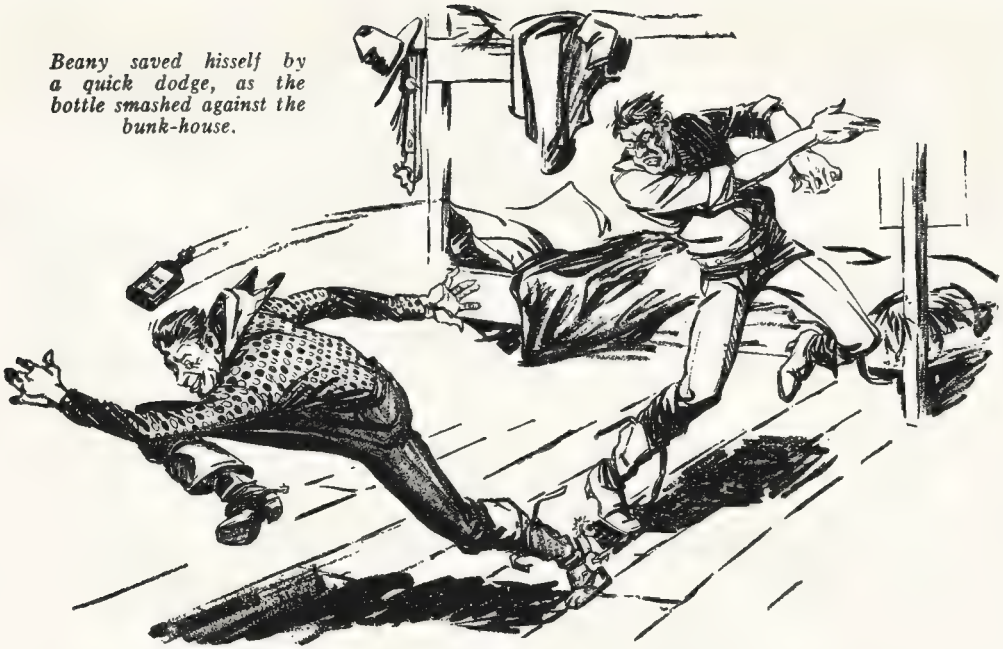
WELL, doggone me, right there I did pitch clean outa the saddle—so to speak! Millie sayin' the Parson's homely mug was "a good face!" Of course, I knowed he had brains; but with that face in front of 'em it seemed to me they was operatin' at a turrible disadvantage.

"You can't allus tell about a man by the shape of his face," I admits. "Sometimes it doesn't mean a thing 'cept that his store teeth don't hitch right. But you sure stagger me with them facts about the Parson. What else did he confess to?"

"Wasn't that enough?" Millie tosses at me, sarcastic-like. "I certainly thought so. Yet he said he had something worse to tell. He said it would ease his conscience to confess to some one he could trust; then he changed his mind and wouldn't tell me. He said it would make me afraid of him."

"I'll get it outa him!" I says, purtendin' to be real mad. "He can't make me afraid. I'll put a bullet—"

Beany saved hisself by a quick dodge, as the bottle smashed against the bunk-house.



"Oh, that reminds me!" Millie exclaims. "He says he's carrying eight bullets now from different shooting scrapes he's been in along the border. Jim, what do you think? Is—is Parson Pat really a bad man? Or is he just a good liar?"

"I don't think there's any doubt about it," I says solemnly.

"Jim, do be serious!" Millie scolds me.

"I am," I tells her. "It's a real *see*-rious situation. I allus felt that the Parson was totin' around a deep and dark secret; but I didn't have no idee it was that bad. I just thought mebbe he had killed his wife—and then deserted her, or something like that. Still, it's gen'rally the meekest lookin' bronc' that raises the most hell. So I advise you to lead the Parson on with a firm but gentle rein. Get him to confess all the true facts about hisself. If he's worth *ree*-formin' we'll try it; but I don't hold out no hope. Men is like bronc's, only wuss. If they aint broke right when they're young they aint nothin' to do but shoot 'em."

Well, Millie don't say nothin' for a minute, just looks at me; and finally she says she'll think over my suggestion and let me know. I'm real curious, of course, to hear her tell what the Parson confesses. I see the Parson every night, but he don't get a chance to tell me much 'cept that the scheme is workin' fine; so I'm surprised and disappointed when three days go by without a word from Millie.

I'm gettin' a *pree*-monition that trouble

is goin' to stampede our way when one evenin' Parson Pat, lookin' sadder'n ever and actin' all mysteer-i-ous, calls me over where we can talk without the boys hearin' us.

"Jim," he says, "I was winnin' the game, but now I'm stuck. Millie had swallowed everything I told her about my wild an' wicked past an' was beginnin' to show a real int'rest in my *ree*-formation when I snagged my rope by braggin' too much about some wonderful shootin' I've done when in a tight place. Now she insists that I give her an exhibition o' my marksmanship. If I don't do it, she's goin' to think that I've been lyin' to her all the time."

"Well, why don't you give her an exhibition?" I asks, innercent-like.

"Why don't I?" snickers the Parson. "You know damn' well I aint no gun-totin' wildcat! I can do as much with a six-gun as any *hombre* in this county; but when it comes to the fancy frills o' gun-play an' slug-slingin', why, I'm just a honest, hard-workin' puncher an'—"

"Stop!" I tells him. "Again I have to do yore thinkin' for you; and I've done it! You tell Millie that after a conference with me you have consented to give her and me a private exhibition o' yore quick drawin' and straight shootin'. Tell her it has to be private because no other livin' human can toss lead like you do and if all the boys was to see it some o' them might discover yore real identity. Now

just leave *dee-tails* to me!" I goes on as he starts to puff up with questions. "I'll have a talk with Beany and will then give you yore instructions. Meanwhile, let the matter stand just as it is now in *status quo* without change." And I hurry off to find Beany.

Well, Beany hesitates, sayin' he aint hankerin' to get shot by some one who don't mean to do it; but finally he agrees. So I instructs the Parson; and next mornin' early finds me and Millie and Parson Pat ridin' off to'rd an old corral about a mile west o' the ranch-house. I'm carryin' a big sack o' empty tomato cans, and the Parson is totin' two big forty-fives, ammunition, and a dangerous look.

ABOUT a hundred and fifty yards from the corral, Pat Parson, as per my *pre-*vious instructions, halts us.

"The very place!" he exclaims. "*Ree-*minds me of once when I was cornered in a box cañon without food, water or tobacker—an' a dozen bloodthirsty Injuns a-waitin' at the mouth o' the cañon to shoot me down like a dog without mercy. Jim, ride over an' stick them cans on top o' that corral fence an' I'll show you how I—"

"Just a minute!" Millie speaks up as I start to ride off. "Pat, do you mean to tell me you can hit a tomato can almost five hundred feet away—with a revolver?"

"I'll plug a dozen of 'em right smack in the center!" retorts Pat. "Jim, go on so's we can start the exhibition!"

"Stop, Jim!" orders Millie. "I want to see those cans you have in the sack!"

Well, I looks quick at the Parson, and the Parson looks at me; then we both look at Millie.

"Don't try to appear so offended!" snaps Millie. "I know something about what a man can do with a six-gun. Just dump out those cans!"

At that, I dumps them out, havin' counted on just that play. And, of course, the cans is all in good health. Millie is a heap puzzled and says nothin' as I sack up the cans again and ride off to'rd the old corral.

Beany is there, as per my plan, hidin' behind the fence where Millie can't see him. He's settin' on a sack just like the one I'm totin'.

"Did you shoot holes in all them cans?" I asks him, quietly.

Beany squirts a pint o' tobacker juice at a snake-hole and gives me a black look.

"I did!" he grumbles. "An' then I walked half a mile with them from the wash where I left my bronc'. I been waitin' here, wantin' a smoke an'—"

"You've done fine!" I tells him, layin' my cans on the top rail. "Now keep yore ears open and every time you hear a shot—yank off a can!"

"I understand that, all right; but s'posin' that damn' train robber just happens to throw a bullet through a crack in that fence where at that *pree-*cise moment I just happen to have an important part o' my anatomy?"

"He wont," I argues. "I told him to shoot high. But if he does happen to hit you, just keep still about it until after the exhibition."

"The hell I will!" snorts Beany, which is all I hear, for I'm ridin' off to one side and wavin' to the Parson to start the show.

WELL, I'm tellin' you it was some show! Parson Pat aint no crack shot, of course; but as an actor he was all wool, a yard wide, full weight and a hundred per cent *net*.

The hosses, of course, is left where they wont bother. Pat is talkin' with Millie, smokin' a cigarette, with his back to the corral. Suddenly he whirls. *Bang!*

And Beany yanks one o' them tomato cans off the fence!

The Parson tosses his six-gun in the air, catches it in his *left* hand—and *bang! bang!* Two cans disappear.

Then he walks off a distance. He comes back a-runnin', jumpin' crooked like a Injun dodgin' bullets, and yellin' like his pants was full o' hornets. He shoots under his arm, behind his head, between his legs, and contorts hisself plumb *ree-*dulous. And with every shot a can drops off the fence into the corral.

He stops a minute to say something to Millie. I can't hear, bein' too far away, but I see him re-loadin' both guns. Then I see him holster one gun and give the other one to Millie. I'm wonderin' if she's goin' to plumb ruin the game by takin' a couple shots herself when, suddenly, she tosses the gun to the Parson. He catches it, whirls around, and fires.

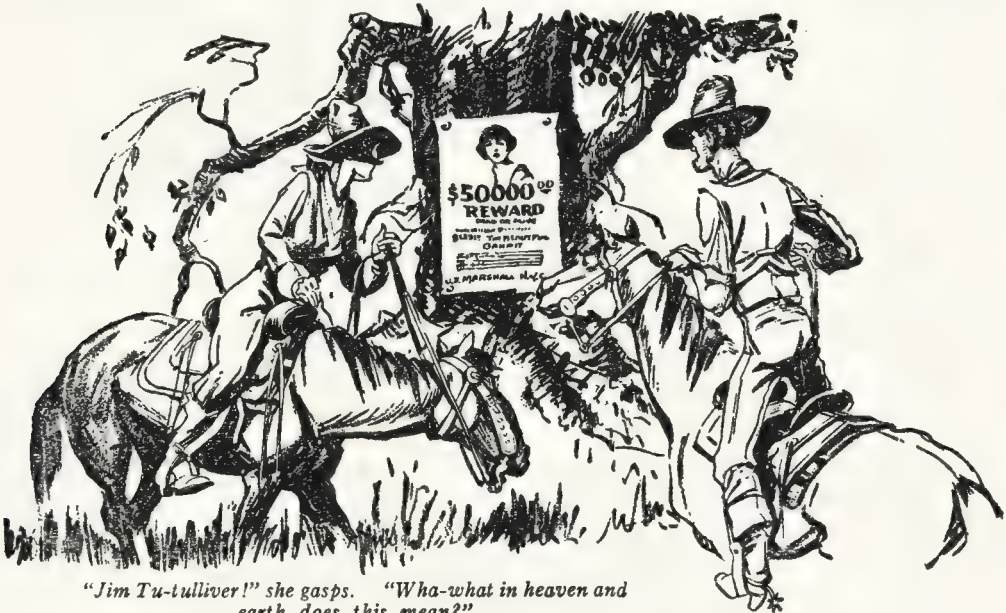
But no can drops! Instead, I hear a noise over by the corral fence like some confirmed exponent o' the art o' profanity is practicin' for a cussin' tournament! "You're shootin' too low!" I yells quick to the Parson; but he don't hear me,

probably bein' too busy explainin' to Millie that he missed on purpose, there bein' only three cans left on the fence.

Before I can yell again, the Parson takes another shot. Still no can drops—and now I'm gettin' real worried about Beany, for I don't hear him cussin'. I see Millie is watchin' them cans while the Parson is talkin' to her real *see-rious*. I'm thinkin' I'd better attract his attention so I can ride over to the fence without gettin' shot. I pulls my six-gun, sticks it straight up in the sky—and at the *pree-*

"You oughta be hung by the neck until dead—and then buried alive. I hope yore friend bites you—twice in the same place!"

Then I picks up the sack o' cans Beany has punctured, and climbs back over the fence. I see Millie is headin' for the hosses and the Parson follerin' her like he's all excited. Afraid that Millie is plannin' to ride to the corral to investigate, I fans the breeze. When I gets where they are, Millie is on her pinto. She's talkin' quiet-like to the Parson, and her voice is all



"Jim Tu-tulliver!" she gasps. "Wha-what in heaven and earth does this mean?"

cise instant that I pull the trigger, the Parson turns around, so I know that both he and Millie see what happens—which is plenty.

Bang! goes my noise-tool. And Beany, the durned idiot, *yanks all three cans off the fence!*

BELIEVE me, I sure rides over there in a rush; and all the time I'm wishin' that fool Beany *had* been hit and plumb paralyzed. Then I see what's wrong. They's an old bull rattler coiled by the fence, madder'n hell.

"He wants me to stay off'n his front porch," says Beany, squirtin' a load o' tobacker juice at the rattler's head. "I'm sorry I got two cans behind. But I made up for it that last shot."

"You shore made a mess o' things!" I tells him as I climb down into the corral.

choky with bein' mad or sorry, I don't know which. Neither of them seems to notice or care that I'm listenin'.

"I—I did like you, Pat," Millie is sayin'. "I liked you—a lot more than I dared to let you know. That's why I tried to appear indifferent. Don't you understand? Of course, you don't. I was a fool for letting myself care for you. But—I couldn't help it. I thought you were—well, different. I believed you were sincere. And now—you've ruined everything. When you began telling me all those horrible things—"

Right there Millie shudders and chokes off. Seein' she's fixin' to leave, I speak up quick. Since it was me got the Parson into this mess, I figgers I better try to help him out.

"Millie," I says, "I don't believe them things are true—"

"Mister Tulliver!" Millie cracks at me. "It's a matter of *supreme indifference* to me *now* whether they are true or false. If true, that man is a *thief and a murderer*. If false, he is a *fool and a liar*. In either case, he can *never* mean anything to me—*now*."

And with that, Millie turns her pinto and rides off to'rd the ranch-house.

AFTER a while I takes a hitch in my nerve and looks around at Parson Pat. He's standin' with his thumbs in his belt and his eyes on the ground.

"Pat," I begins, "I *honestly thought* it was a smart scheme, but I see now it wasn't. You don't dare tell Millie them things is true, and you don't dare tell her they aint. I've sure got you in a turrible perdicament, and I wish—"

Right there the Parson looks up at me. "I wish," he says, solemnly, "that you was in hell—with yore back broke."

Well, I drift back to the ranch-house feelin' like I wasn't fit even to be pall-bearer at a skunk's funeral. Not because the Parson rides off and leaves me alone—which he does; but on account o' Millie. Doggone it, if she liked the Parson she oughta have him! He's a thoroughbred, *net*; which same she is. But how was I goin' to square things? I couldn't see.

Neither could Pecos Charley nor Beany. "Parson Pat is pitched clean outa the saddle on to a barbed-wire fence," Pecos sums up the situation. "He can't stay on the fence, and he dassn't get off. We've sure got him in one helluva perdicament!"

"I bet *something* happens afore night!" says Beany; "an' I bet it happens *to us*!"

But before night they was a rumor around that the Parson had skipped! That's important enough that I busts right over to see the boss. And fust thing I notice is that Millie's picture is gone!

"Was Parson Pat here today?" I asks.

"He was waitin' here when I came in," says Herb. "Wanted a few days off and I gave them to him. Why?"

"Nothin' a-tall," I says.

"You're a liar," says Herb. "They's something wrong an' I know it. Jim, you *hombres* leave that boy alone! You hear? When Millie puts her o. k. on any one, they suit me. You understand?"

"I sure do," I tells him, and gets out. I don't want to tell him that he'll never see the Parson again, and I don't want to be there when he misses that picture.

THAT was on a Thursday. Well, on the next Sunday mornin', just as I was rollin' out, who should I find waitin' for me but Parson Pat!

"Jim," he says quietly, "I'm goin' to give you a chance to square yoreself. Will you take it?"

"I shore will," I tells him quick. "But I think—"

"I'm doin' my own thinkin' this time!" he snaps me off. "You shut up an take orders. Now listen close! Millie has been wantin' to ride over to Mad Creek Cañon. Don't ask her to go, but tell her that this bein' Sunday you're goin' over there to loaf around. Don't let anyone go with you but Millie. Understand?"

Well, I don't understand a-tall; but the look on Pat's homely mug warns me that for the good o' my health I'd better do as he says. So nine o'clock that mornin' finds me and Millie ridin' down the Cañon City trail, Millie bein' anxious to get away after she heard that Parson Pat had come back.

"I shall keep my promise not to betray him to Uncle Herb," Millie tells me; "but I did hope that he would be a gentleman enough to go away and *stay* away. He certainly has sense enough to know that I never *never* want to see him again—*never*!"

I don't say a word to that because I learned long ago that when a woman is so doggone emphatic about anything she's just tryin' to make herself believe a durned lie she knows aint true. Besides, I'm wonderin' what the Parson's game is. All I can see is that on his way back from Cañon City, or Phoenix, wherever he'd been, he would pass within two miles of Mad Creek Cañon. Had he been over there for some dark and sinister purpose? Why had he stolen Millie's picture? Was he waitin' in ambush for us and if so, why? I just couldn't figger it, a-tall.

WE was in the cañon, and was headin' for a place we gen'rally camped while workin' that end o' Happy Valley, when Millie points to something white tacked on one o' the piñons along the creek. We rides over to see what it is—and damn me if I don't get the biggest knock-out mystifyin' surprise o' my ornery and eventful life!

I just can't believe my eyes; but I know I'm seein' straight because Millie gasps, splutters, reads a few words out loud,

gasps wusser'n ever, then whirls on me in complete, flabbergasted astonishment.

"Jim Tu-tulliver!" she tumbles at me. "Wha-what in heaven and on earth does this mean?"

I'm too speechless for words, so don't say nothin'. Besides, I'm suddenly knocked flat by a thunderin' suspicion that explodes in my think-box.

That there thing on the tree is a printed notice. At the bottom are the words: "United States Marshal, New York City." At the top, looking just like her 'ceptin' that one eye is all smeary with ink, is a picture of Millie!

And beneath Millie's picture is this:

\$50,000 REWARD!

Dead or Alive!!

Look Out for This Woman!!!!

Miss Millie Burkenhalter, alias Bessie, the Beautiful Bandit!!!!

Description, also marks and scars: Age, not given, but looks younger; height 5 ft., 5 in.; eyes very blue and very pretty; when last seen was wearing brown hair; complexion one hundred percent net, but subject to change without notice; occupation bandit and bunco artist, but may try to pose as honest painter; has mole behind left ear and two freckles on nose.

Bessie is a very beautiful and intelligent woman, but an extremely dangerous character. Officers everywhere are warned that she will resist arrest and is a killer.

She is wanted for murder, arson, forgery, bigamy, counterfeiting, fishing without a license, passing bad checks, bomb outrages, failure to pay dog tax, blackmail, embezzlement, rum-running, cheating at poker, calf-stealing, robbing U. S. mails, hi-jacking, brand-blotting, bribery, breaking and entering in the daytime, gambling on Sunday, safe-cracking, burglary in the night time, operating a shell game, wife-beating, carrying concealed weapons, highway robbery, and reckless driving.

Well, I've just finished readin' that and am wonderin' how much the Parson had to pay a printer for perpetratin' that outrage when I hear a hoss comin' and I turn quick. Of course, it's the Parson; and, of course, he draws up as if surprised at meetin' us. "Why—why, hello," he says, and then chokes off as he purtends to discover that *ree*-ward notice. He rides up quick, and suddenly he's madder'n a hungry hornet. He rips that notice off the tree, tears it to bits, and hurls them into the creek.

"Ten thousand curses on that pin-headed sheriff!" he orates. "I told him that if he stuck up any more o' them notices I'd murder him an' then skin him alive. An' I'm goin' to do it!"

THEY'S a silence like the hull blamed world has suddenly stopped movin'. I look around at Millie. She's starin' at the Parson with fire blazin' in her eyes.

"Mr. O'Dowd," she says, like a knife rippin' through rawhide, "what does this mean? Explain this—this insult at once!"

The Parson looks at her a minute with them sad eyes o' his'n; then he puts out both arms. "Bessie!" he pleads; "wont you trust me? I knowed all the time; an' I been pertectin' you, Bessie—"

"Bessie!" gasps Millie. "You—you dare to call me that! You—"

"I allus think of you as what you are—Bessie, the Bee-yutiful Bandit," goes on the Parson sadly. "I'm just a plain, honest, hard-workin' cowboy, myself; and I don't want you to feel hard to'rd me for makin' up all them stories I told you. I cared for you a heap more'n you realized, an' I wanted you to admire me like I admired you. Don't you understand?"

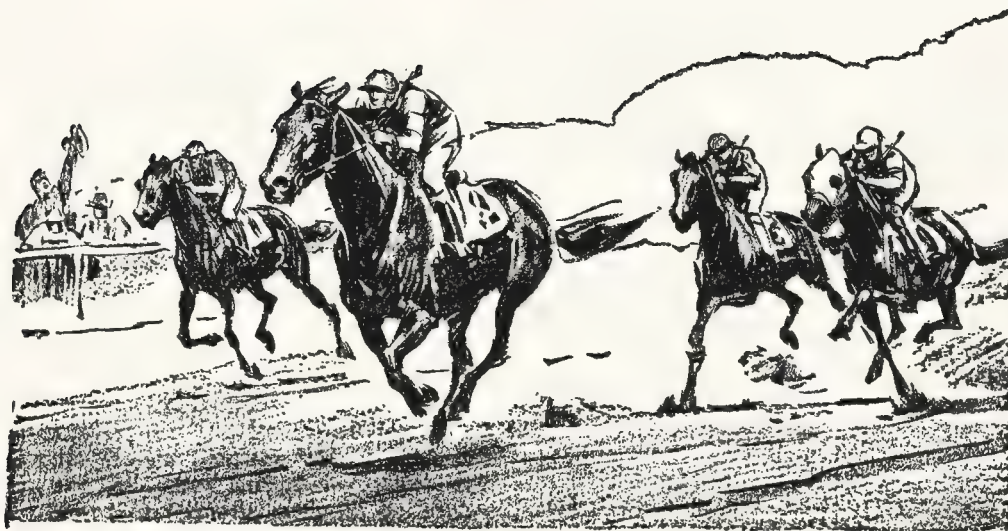
MILLIE is plumb speechless then, so the Parson goes on: "Of course, I done wrong; but I couldn't help it—I loved you so. And Bessie, it don't make no difference to me what you've been. If you want to go on bein' a bandit, I'll perfect you with my heart's blood. Or, if you want to cut out the crooked game an' go honest, I'll lay my good name at yore feet for better or for worse. Of course, after the life you've lived it wont be easy to settle down, but I'll be patient."

Right there I can't look at the Parson no more and keep from laughin'; so I look around at Millie. She's studyin' the Parson's face.

"Of course, I don't ask you to decide at once," the Parson says resignedly; "so I make this suggestion: Let's me an' you get married an' then talk it over. Dog-gone it, Millie—er—Bessie, *I'm takin' as many chances as you are!*"

At that, Millie turns slowly to look at me. She's bitin' them pretty lips o' her'n something shameful. Her eyes is shinin'. And—she's flashin' me a message that says I've suddenly become about as welcome in that immediate vicinity as a sin-hardened sheepman at a cowboy's wedding!

So me and my bronc', we waltz off down the home trail to tell the boys how Parson Pat got outa his perdicament and at the same time dropped his string over the proud head of "Bessie, the Beautiful Bandit!"



The Badge-Horse

By EWING WALKER

SAUNTERING along the track, Badger droned his impromptu verses to an unvarying and melancholy air.

Tim cut across an' took the r-a-i-l;
Went to the bat an' then set s-a-i-l—

Ex-jockey of mediocre ability; tout and clocker who tried, more or less successfully, to shoot straight and tote fair, Badger Magee sang his way through a splotchy life. Care-free or worried, flush or broke, he sang right on.

Climbing the fence over by the backstretch of the Jefferson Race Track, Badger approached the barns; and coming to the section where Lem Brooks had his string of thoroughbreds quartered, seated himself upon an empty box, resting his back against a whitewashed wall.

A blanketed two-year-old thrust its head over the half-door and inquisitively nosed his faded cap. The sun sank low, red with the promise of a fair morrow.

"Lem," said Badger, "you told me once, back yonder when they was runnin' at St. Looney, that I done you a real favor an' you wouldn't mind payin' it back."

Lem glanced toward him a little ques-

tioningly—maybe just a little suspiciously. He nodded, once.

"Well, Lem, you can do that thing now."

"How, Badger?"

"Well, Lem, I need a little change. Fact is, just 'tween us an' all dead stewards, I'm sort o' figurin' on gettin' married."

Lem grinned. "Congratulations!"

"Them aint what I most needs."

"Aint? What you in the market for?"

"Help."

"What kind?"

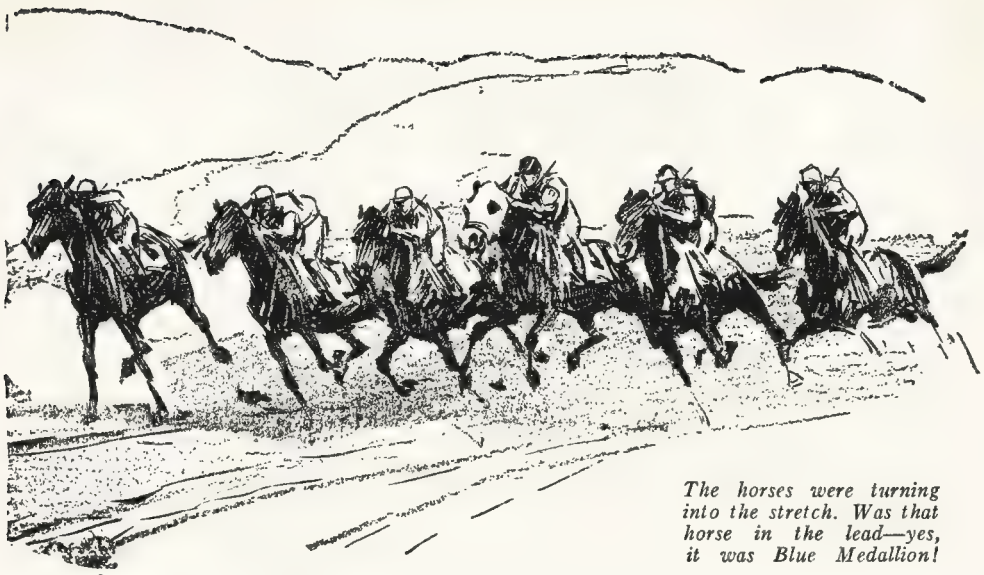
Badger closed one eye. "Money! No loan, but money. Some folks says two can live as cheap as one: but I know that aint so, 'cause I've lived on fo' bits a day less than nothin'. So, no marryin' for me without a grub-and-corset stake."

"They don't wear corsets no more."

"Maybe not; but most of 'em likes a few rations now an' then—an' maybe a shoe or two."

"Where do I come in?"

"The fifth race tomorrow is a two-hoss race. You know it an' I know it. Seven or eight are goin' to start, but the race



The horses were turning into the stretch. Was that horse in the lead—yes, it was Blue Medallion!

When "They're Off!" there's always a thrill—and especially when a lame thoroughbred is called upon to forget lameness and show her speed. This is by a writer who knows horses and men and their various ways of winning.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

is between Claudius an' your Scorpion; an' you know an' I know that Scorpion can breeze home if you're shootin' with him. If you aint shootin' with him, it's Claudius' race."

Again Badger paused. Lem glanced significantly at his watch.

"Now, Lem, just tell me whether you're goin' to let Scorpion win, an' we'll call ourselves square on that St. Looney business."

Lem rose and glanced about; then, confidentially, he leaned over Badger.

"Don't play Scorpion!" he whispered.

BADGER departed, feeling secure in the word given him, through gratitude, for an old and real favor. The morrow looked rosy with promise. Jauntily he walked along the darkening track.

A little later he passed into the Acme Lunch-room, that odorous rendezvous for jockeys, trainers, exercise boys and horse-men in general. Small, threadbare, neat, with narrow but squared shoulders, he was a strange mixture of diminutive dignity and colorlessness.

Wearing a glad grin, he paused before

the cash-register. A tall, plump woman behind the counter smiled happily.

"Badger!"

"Good evenin', Miss Minnie!" Regardless of their impending nuptials, Badger always addressed her as "Miss."

"Honey, don't you want some coffee?"

"I do, Miss Minnie; but first let me break the glad news: maybe our track has been heavy and slow for a long, long time—an' neither of us mud-runners; but it's dryin' out fast now!"

"Tell me 'bout it."

Badger did, to the clattering accompaniment of heavy dishes.

Miss Minnie's eyes glowed. "Badger, that's just grand! Then we can—"

"Yes, Miss Minnie, then we can get married. I've got right near a hundred dollars."

"And I've got four hundred and ten."

"Call it five hundred. We'll slap it all on his nose. It's a set-up. He'll pay six to one sure as he'll pay a dime. Tomorrow night, Miss Minnie, me and you ought to have over three thousand dollars."

Miss Minnie had been a matter of years accumulating that fund; but it never oc-

curred to Badger that there might be any impropriety in using her funds to win a stake; and it never occurred to the adoring and generously fleshed Miss Minnie that her dignified, if frayed little Badger could err.

NEXT day the start of the fifth race found Badger and Miss Minnie confidently leaning upon the rail near the judges' stand. Just about all their combined wealth had been wagered upon Claudius to win.

Contentedly the two watched the barrier flash. One grimly, the other aghast, watched not Claudius but Lem Brooks' Scorpion romp home an easy winner. For a long moment they were silent, staring at each other.

"Badger, it's gone!"

"Yes, Miss Minnie, it's sure gone; but don't cry, honey! Now, Miss Minnie, don't cry!" Badger reached up to pat a trembling fat shoulder.

"Was you—was you double-crossed, honey?" choked Miss Minnie.

"The worst of my misguided life! And it was to return a favor! Some day—some day—" He lapsed into silence. Then: "He just can't go straight! You know Curley Waite's book?"

His dejected fiancée nodded.

"Well, Lem owns that book. I ought've known better. For the owner of a stable to be a bookmaker is like a sheriff sellin' booze. But some day—some day—"

LATE that afternoon Badger again walked along the line of barns toward Lem's quarters. A lark off somewhere in the infield, scattered crickets, a deep-throated frog, an occasional neigh or whinny broke the silence of the fading twilight; and Badger, slouching along through the creeping dusk, raised his voice in his interminable improvised song.

A snake-bite's mean; a mule-kick's bad;
But a Scorpion's sting's the worst I've had!

He lolled up to Lem's stables, found an empty box and sat down. An expression of peace and good will rested upon his pinched little face. Lem, expecting reproaches, eyed him suspiciously.

"Badger, I'm sorry about today, but I just couldn't help it. You ought to know that I've got a big stable here, and it takes a heap of money. We needed that race. Scorpion paid three to one. If folks

had gone plastering bets all over the ring, he wouldn't have paid better'n even money."

Badger tossed a pebble toward a darting lizard. Seemingly the costly fifth race was obliterated from his mind.

"Lem, you own a heap o' hosses, don't you?"

"Sure! What are you driving at?"

Badger gazed placidly toward a thoroughbred's head thrust from a stall door. "Well, now, that's fine! And I haven't got even a shingle for a roof. In this game you're a big one and I'm a mighty little one."

A horse-fly zoomed by; a horse crashed a hoof against its stall wall; a cur dog fled, howling, before a menacing boot.

"Ever study natural history, Lem? It's a mighty interesting sub-ject. Now take the elephant: He's powerful big, but a mouse can worry him."

"Say, what's the big idea? You dippy?"

Apparently Badger did not hear.

"Badger," began Lem, "you're sore about Scorpion coppin' in that fifth race. You oughtn't to be, but I can see you are. Now I'm going to make you a proposition that'll more than even things up."

"Shoot it, Lem."

"I'm goin' to sell you a hoss at a price that's just the same as givin' it to you."

"Well, Lem, seein' as how I need a hoss about as much as you do angel wings, your chances are kind o' slim. Now, if I needed one as much as you do a forked tail—"

"I'll give you a real bargain."

"I'm no hoss owner. I'm a tout—and sometimes a rotten one—'specially on fifth races."

At this a slightly deeper shade of red spread over Lem's face.

"That's what I'm getting at. You are a tout. You ought to have a badge-horse. Think how much better you could work if you sported an owner's badge."

"Maybe so, but even badge-horses eat. Just what is this masked marvel you're honin' to sell me?"

"Blue Medallion."

Badger's eyes opened wide in mock surprise. "Poor Meddy! Hasn't took a step without a limp in eighteen months."

"Not quite that bad, Badger. She has pulled up lame after her works, I'll admit; but you ought to get her over it if you take plenty of time."

"Yes, she'll get over it—when she goes

to the glue factory. Lem, didn't Meddy win you some races when she was a two-year-old?"

"Four."

"You got a farm. Why don't you retire her?"

IMPATIENTLY Lem rose. No sentiment played a part in the doings of Lem Brooks. "I'm not runnin' any retreat for thoroughbreds! What'll you give me for her?"

"Barren too, eh?"

"How should I know?"

"With her blood lines, you'd breed her if she wasn't. No—can't use her."

"All right!" Lem turned with a manner of dismissal.

"What you figure on doin' with the little lady, Lem?"

"Doin' with her? I'll sell her to a huckster. We're shipping to Lexington day after tomorrow, and I'm gonna get rid of her before then—regardless!"

"Lem, you kind o' owe that little mare somethin' better than the starvin' life of a huckster's nag."

"Do you want her?"

"No; but before I'd see her go like that—"

"Fifty dollars."

"Too much."

"Twenty-five!"

"That's buyin' trouble too high!"

Impatiently, Lem threw away the fragment of an unlighted cigar. "Take her now, and you can have the damned cripple for nothin'!"

"That's too cheap!"

"Wh-a-a-t?"

"Lem, I don't want you to give me anything! I'll give you fo' bits for the mare, a halter and a bill-of-sale."

"She's yours! God help you both!"

Badger shuffled away leading the limping Blue Medallion. Night was at hand; a wraithy mist from Pontchartrain and the marshes floated over the land; far off, among the barns, a negro sang. Badger and his badge-horse passed through the gateway.

A FEW days later Badger ambled along a sandy road of southern Louisiana, a lead rope over his shoulder, a limping bay mare trailing behind. Swamp or marsh-land lay on either side; live-oaks and sweetgums, with Spanish moss drooping from their branches, mottled the way

with blotches of shade. Slouching along, Badger sang, to his unvarying tune:

Bought me a hoss when I didn't need none,
And I'm on my way to Lex-ing-ton!

"Now, Meddy," to the mare, "I've been more'n fair with you! I'm pretty good at this rhymin', and we agreed, me an' you, that whenever I started a verse an' couldn't finish it, I'd git down an' walk. I've done that an' more. I've walked a heap when my po'try was comin' slick an' strong, so you aint got no kick comin'. D'y'see that dead pine yonder? Well, that's where I get aboard. If you think I'm goin' to walk plumb to Lexington, your conclusions is erroneous. You can just favor that game leg as best you can, whilst I keeps a sharp lookout for food and lodging. . . . Listen!" A whippoorwill called from the depths of the swamp. "That, Meddy, was a whippoorwill; and when he starts tunin' up, it means night aint far off—and this swamp aint no fittin' place for white folks and thoroughbreds to bed down. Brace yo'self!"

Badger, stepping to a stump, mounted. He rode without saddle, a blanket, secured by a cord, serving in its stead.

The mare limped on through the sand; the shadows deepened; the trees lost their sharp outlines and the road lay hidden in the twilight ahead.

"I'm a tout, Meddy, and that means an outcast. You're a discard. You're lame, and a lame thoroughbred's as valuable as an empty quart. I'm broke—or right at it—and night's comin' on. If that aint a combination to lay off of, my name aint Badger Magee!"

That night they spent at a poverty-touched little swamp-edge farm. The next day, the rising sun saw him riding the limping bay mare through the rising mist. Badger Magee and Blue Medallion were Lexington-bound. The winter race meet at Jefferson had just closed. From there the horses were moved, some to Florida, some to the Mexican tracks, some across town to the Fair Grounds, where they would race around the white-washed live-oaks till Mardi Gras—and then back again across town to Jefferson, for a few more weeks of milling crowds, of the call of the bugle, the *zing!* of barriers and the whirl and drive, the punch, the pull and the gripping thrill of colorful racing. But Badger had passed up

the Fair Grounds and the second meet at Jefferson. For the first time in his life he owned a thoroughbred. That thoroughbred, duly registered as Blue Medallion, he knew had shown lameness for well nigh a year and a half. What the trouble was Badger did not know; but he did know that customary measures and usual training practices had not remedied the trouble. That he could cure it he had little hope; but as he had the mare and as he did not fancy seeing her pass to the ill-treatment of a huckster, he at least would try; and far back in his mind, an impish thought clung stubbornly: If he only *could* round her out—if he only *could* just once parade her before the shifty eyes of Lem Brooks!

Blue Medallion had enjoyed the usual pampering and care of the thoroughbred. From the blue grass of Kentucky she had gone to the choice oats and sweet hay, the deep bedding, clear water and regular rubbing of the racing stable. Her workouts had been short and regular—tasty little daily morsels of exercise. Her life, thus far, had been spent in equine luxury—most of it in ease and idleness. Badger recalled the old days of American racing when a horse went upon its own feet from Charleston to Kentucky or from Kentucky to Washington or New York—or to the old Pharsalia track at Natchez, or to New Orleans—at any or all of these tracks to race grueling four-mile heats; and he recalled the methods of a taciturn, silent, collarless half-Indian trainer who, with his little horse White Silver, had won about every rich event in the country the year before, and who trained his charge in all manner of weather.

BADGER had decided to take Blue Medallion to the Lexington spring meet; and he decided to take her through the country. This thing of shipping by express was fast, but it cost money. He had mighty little money but plenty of time. Just how far it was he did not know; but if he made fifteen miles a day, a hundred days would find him fifteen hundred miles from New Orleans—and Lexington shouldn't be further than that.

If Blue Medallion had to rough it, if she was walked day after day through the flat marsh country and on through the hills, come rain, come sun, if she ate what came to hand, from roadside grass to creole flint corn, maybe she'd toughen

and throw off that lameness. If she did, he'd win a race or two; if she didn't, why—she'd be a badge-horse right on, and he an owner, sporting an owner's badge as a lure to the credulous.

Through the land of rice and sugarcane they made their way northward toward the far-away hills about Lexington. For a while he rode, singing his endless song; more often he walked, a frayed rope in his hand, a limping mare behind. Soon they were friends. At wayside stores he bought her bits of sugar and tasty morsels; he discussed with her, in his drawling tones, all manner of things, from past and very real adversity to future and very hazy wealth. By the third day she whinnied when he tied and left her, and nosed him affectionately upon his return.

When blarney sufficed, they ate and slept without paying. When need be, Badger paid for their keep. On northward they trudged, two pictures rarely absent from his mind: One was of Lexington, lying far ahead in green-mantled hills; the other of the discomfiting finish of a certain fifth race at Jefferson, when one chestnut Scorpion easily scored over the bay Claudius. . . .

At one small town Blue Medallion had a new experience. Badger's funds were about gone. He stopped before a plantation store and talked with the owner, a red-skinned, keen-eyed personage.

Badger started out with his suave and ingratiating manner. "Mister, this is my friend Miss Blue Medallion. Somehow, she likes to eat fairly regular. I'm about broke." Something told Badger he need not try to fool this man.

"Can't give you a thing, stranger."

"Don't want it give. Can I earn it?"

The planter thought a moment. "Will your mare work to a wagon?"

This was rather a shock. The idea of a thoroughbred being put to a wagon—still, eat she must.

"She never has, boss; but I'll try her."

A trade was made. Badger, carrying on the while a low-toned, reassuring conversation with the mare, fitted her with a comfortable collar—it seemed desecration—and hooked her to a wagon alongside an old, steady draft-horse. It all seemed outrageous to Meddy—that heavy thing around her neck, the clattering gear all about and a ponderous, rolling thing behind. It was decidedly wrong. There came a driving temptation to smash out

furiously with both hind feet; but as quickly would come the caressing touch of Badger and the low, reassuring voice of Badger; so, trembling, she stood there and endured it. Somehow, she knew that, strange as it all was, the whole was right, for Badger had put it there. Almost before she knew it, she and the stolid old horse at her side were dragging the wagon back and forth between the railroad station and the plantation, and between the store and plantation cabins.

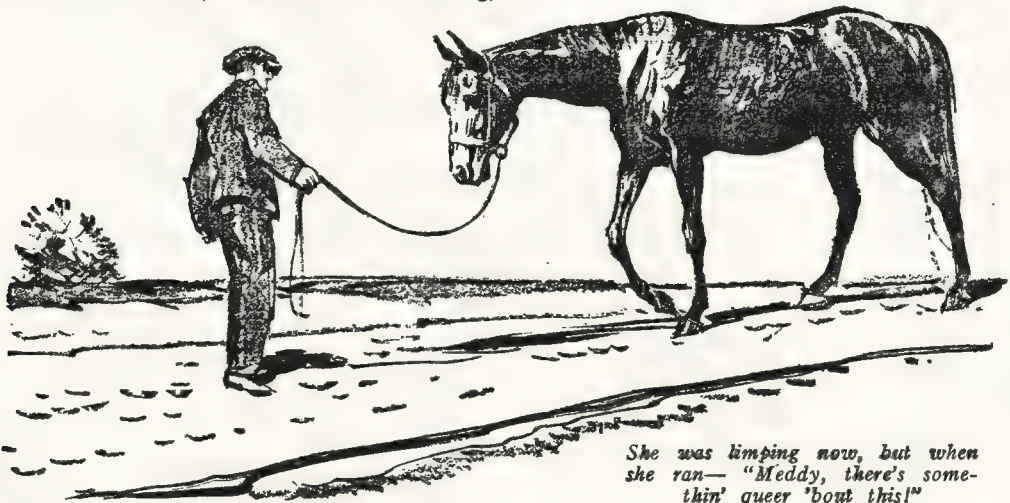
Badger and Blue Medallion stayed there two weeks; then one clear morning,

a sharp run. He let her go for half a mile. As he pulled her up, his little eyes opened wide; he leaned over, glancing at her mincing feet. Then he started her off again at a walk, carefully studying those same mincing feet, wondering.

She was limping now, as of old; but while she ran—

"Meddy, there's somethin' queer 'bout this! There's somethin' queer!"

Thereupon he entered a period of studied experimentation. The following day he



She was limping now, but when she ran— "Meddy, there's somethin' queer 'bout this!"

the comfortable old blanket was tossed over her back, Badger climbed aboard, and once more they were headed northward. Blue Medallion felt gloriously free and vigorous and happy. The hair was gone from two spots on her sides, where the traces had rubbed, and there was a dim rim about her neck, where the collar had been—strange insignia for a thoroughbred to bear; but she stepped jauntily along through the warming day. And Badger sang his eternal song. For somewhere, somewhere away off yonder along that road, lay hills of a mellow green, and Kentucky and Lexington; milling crowds, flashing barriers, clear-toned bugles, wealth—Minnie.

EARLY one clear, crisp, nigh-cold morning a great wonderment and a great hope flashed across Badger's mind. They were passing down a clay hill. A gust of wind sent a sheet of paper scurrying across the road. The mare playfully shied and then broke down the road in

rode her miles farther and hours longer than she had traveled any day since leaving New Orleans; and the next morning she started off as full of zest as ever, and with no increased lameness.

"Meddy," Badger remarked as they trudged along, "I'm fast gettin' the idea you been foolin' folks!"

One afternoon, coming upon a stretch of firm, level and deserted dirt road, Badger stepped off, as accurately as he could, a half-mile, marking the finish by hanging his cap upon a roadside bush. Returning to the start, he mounted Blue Medallion, took out his cheap stop-watch and "got set" to give her a half-mile trial.

"Now, Meddy, show me what you've got. Let's go-o-o!"

His heels touched her; the bridle-rein brushed her neck. Down the country road they flew. Badger crouched low; the tail of the mare stretched out behind, her belly seemed close to the ground. Past the hat they skimmed. Badger's hand closed upon the watch.

When he had stopped the mare, he glanced at that watch; he studied its dial. Then he broke into a broad grin.

"Meddy, you may be lame, but you sure can step. Maybe me and you gonna fool folks yet!"

THAT day he rode her hard, all the while watching that off-foreleg. There was no change in her lameness. From then on, each day he gave her a stiff work-out of three-quarters of a mile.

Weeks passed, weeks of rainy and dry days, of sun and cloud, of chill and warmth, of straight roads and crooked roads, of rocky ways and smooth ways, of flat and rolling and hilly thoroughfares. Finally one day he rode into Lexington. People glanced smiling toward the rough-coated, shaggy-haired, limping mare, accoutered only in an old bridle and frayed blanket; toward the slouching, ill-clad Badger. It was high-noon. Indifferent to passers-by, he chanted his song:

I told you-all that, rain or sun,
We'd fin'ly git to Lex-ing-ton!

The Lexington spring meet was to open in eight days. They were busy days for Badger. Appearing upon the records as the owner and trainer of Blue Medallion, he was thereby barred from riding her; so, if he would start in a race his rough-coated, collar-marked, trace-branded, limping mare, he must secure the services of another jockey. Badger looked and thought them over. Many, of course, were beyond his reach—these the prosperous and high-and-mighty gentry of spur and bridle. To them Badger and his lame badge-horse were but objects of ridicule. But finally he found old Mickey Cooney, he of past glory and vast experience, whose flag had finally been furlled for bright lights and alcohol.

Badger and Mickey talked far into the night. Beginning the next day, it was Mickey who gave Blue Medallion her work-outs, that they might come to know and understand each other.

As the large-nosed and red-faced Mickey rode her out upon the track, and as Badger, an old blanket over his arm, trailed behind, jests crackled:

"Hey, Mick! That mare needs a shave!"

"And a rollin' chair!"

"What you gonna start her in, Badger? The plow-horse handicap?"

"Better not crowd her trainin' too much, Badger! The Derby aint till May!"

Badger smiled. Mickey, red of jowl and redder of nose, glowered; but he winked knowingly at Badger.

These work-outs were open and above-board affairs. Each day she was brought out for all who wished to see, worked three, five or six furlongs and led, limping, back to her stable. For just about the first time in his drab, obscure life, colorless little Badger became somewhat of a personage. This proposition of seriously training a lame badge-horse attracted the amused interest of all about the track and stables. The clockers, sitting like crows along the rail, hailed him delightedly; one local paper ran a story of the unique pair.

Meanwhile, Badger sent a telegram:

Dear Miss Minnie: Get together all the jack you have and can borrow and come to Lexington tomorrow sure. Our weather is clear, our track fast. Ring and preacher waiting.
BADGER.

The nights had found Badger as busy as had the days. When he arrived at Lexington, he had nine dollars.

But Badger wanted more than nine dollars, and so he proceeded to get more. He sought out every owner, trainer, jockey, valet, tout, clocker, swipe, stableboy he knew. That is, he sought out all but Lem Brooks. He borrowed what he could where he could—ten dollars, twenty-five, one—even four bits. Lem had his stable there, and Badger saw him often.

"Well, if it aint Badger! Boy, how's the badge-horse?"

"Lem, that's some mare! She sure is fond of oats!"

"How's her lameness?"

"Just fine, Lem. It's as healthy a lameness as I ever see. Aint a chance o' losing it. It's holdin' up just splendid!"

Lem chuckled.

"I want to get your advice, Lem. You see, I think a heap of Meddy, and I want to make her comfortable. Reckon I could rig up some kind of a horse-crutch for her?"

"What you want's a shotgun, Badger!"

"For Meddy? Why, Lem, you sure got a cussed disposition! No sir, I don't want no shotgun for Meddy! She's my friend; but I tell you what I do want."

"What's that?"

"A picture frame—I want to put that fo'-bit bill-of-sale you give me in it."



"Maybe several times she did pull up sore and got to limp'in'. She kep' on limp'in'; it's jest habit!"

MINNIE came—her rather bovine eyes, her near-two-hundred pounds of avoirdupois, her quivering and rather ponderous affection, her many-plumed hat, her flounces and laces—all of her came. For a moment at the station Badger all but disappeared in an ecstatic embrace.

"Oh, honey, it sure is good to see you! When—"

"Sunday mornin', I hope, Miss Minnie. You see—"

Badger unfolded the tale. He took Miss Minnie with him and Blue Medallion through the flat lands of Louisiana—to Mickey and the stable and the limping work-outs; to Lem and the other amused ones; to victory and glory and shining romance.

They combined their wealth. It made, in their eyes, a nice stake. Two hundred dollars, they decided, could be wagered. The silent Mickey was called in, and formally presented to the beaming Minnie.

Entering his mare was a momentous occasion to Badger. It was something he had never done before. To own a horse—a thoroughbred—and to enter that horse in a real race was certainly scaling the

heights. Blue Medallion was duly entered in the sixth race on the opening day—a mile and a sixteenth and worth twelve hundred—probably—to the winner. Blue Medallion drew the lightest impost—ninety-eight pounds.

"Can you make that weight, Mickey?"

"Make it? Sure! Git a hair-cut, an' I can ride at ninety flat!"

THEN came the day! As at all Kentucky tracks, they had the pari-mutuel system of betting; but certain books worked right on—as they do at most tracks. There was young Curley Waite, for instance, and Curley was, of course, as all the knowing knew, but an employee of Lem Brooks, who owned the book. That volume was Lem's most profitable, and hence most cherished possession. To add to that book was Lem's chief joy; to take from it his keenest sorrow.

Shortly, very shortly, before the sixth race, Badger went to that book. His cheeks were, perhaps, a little flushed; his eyes possibly sparkled more than usual; but he wore his same whimsical smile. Behind him rose the ample form of Miss Minnie, and by her side, an owner who had known Badger long and well and who now rather pitied him. This owner, just a little reluctantly, had come along as a witness should Badger later need one; and Lem was there, conferring with his henchman Waite. For this Badger was thankful. The fates were good to him.

"What price you got on Blue Medallion, Curley?"

"You can write your own ticket!"

From the corner of his eye, Badger saw Lem striving to repress a smile.

"No, I mean sure 'nough! What price on her?"

"A hundred to one flat—or track odds, if you want 'em."

"I'll take the hundred. Here!" Slowly counting the bills, Badger handed him two hundred dollars, and with his friends, walked off.

"My Gawd, it's robbery!"

"Yep, but that's two hundred at a hundred to one. If anything happened—" Lem studied a moment. "Here! Shake a foot! Spread some of this around among the other books!"

A bell rang; a bugle sounded. The horses had been called to the post. Lem shrugged his shoulders. "Too late now! All right, let her ride! Not a chance!"

Silent, tense but smiling, Badger leaned upon the rail. Miss Minnie leaned upon Badger, her pudgy fingers gripping his arm. Just about all was at stake for Miss Minnie—savings, borrowings, wedding, Badger, romance—and all of these things were out there on the track before her, hanging none too securely upon the rough-coated, limping Blue Medallion.

Zing! "They're off!" One monstrous, awesome voice seemed to shout it. Men and women rose; necks were craned; and then a heavy, enveloping, stifling silence spread over all.

Swush! They were by the stands—ten of them that seemed, to her blurred vision, a gigantic one. Ten driving, hurtling bodies with ten smaller crouching bodies atop them. Around the first turn they tore, and a coat of green was hidden somewhere in that whirling, swirling vortex. After a while there across the track and beyond the green infield they passed—and it seemed that one horse was out in front a little, and that this horse carried a rider of the shade of the hills and the trees on beyond.

A murmur was rising over the multitude. Away off yonder down to the left the horses were turning into the stretch. There was one horse in front, several following in a bunch, and on back of these the usual stragglers. Was that horse in the lead—

Still gripping his arm, Miss Minnie turned wet eyes upon Badger. He looked

up at her. For once his own eyes were moist. He gulped and nodded. Yes, it *was* Blue Medallion. He strove to smile and to hum a little tune; but the smile didn't come very readily, and the tune for once seemed hidden somewhere beyond his whimsical reach. And then—

A rhythmic, flowing thudding of hoofs—and past them and across the finish line flashed a horse of faultless gait. Atop this horse was a little figure in green, still red of face, but with thin lips parted in a broad glad grin.

BADGER hurried through the little gate by the judges' stand, and onto the track. Back they came trotting, with heavy sides, distended nostrils and glowing eyes. In the van came Mickey and Blue Medallion. Now she was limping again, in her usual way.

A raised whip, a motioning judge, a saddle removed, a blanket thrown over a moist, rough-coated mare. An instant Badger took her head in his hands; a long moment he looked into her eyes. Then he hurried up to the judges.

The judges had some very pointed questions to ask. This thing of a lame thoroughbred winning? He told them. As quickly as possible, he told them all. "And, gentlemen, she aint no more lame than what I am. With Meddy limpin' is jest habit. Once—maybe several times—she did pull up sore and got to limpin'. She got over the soreness but kep' on limpin'. It's jest habit. Folks have it and horses have it. She's as sound as the day she was foaled."

A brief consultation, a nod and the bell rang "*Official. Pay off!*"

Badger went down to collect. That is, Badger and Miss Minnie and dour Mickey and Badger's trainer friend all went down to collect. Lem was there with Curley. Perhaps Lem had dined unwisely. In any event, Lem seemed rather grim and pale; and as Curley paid Badger off, the paleness and grimness seemed to increase.

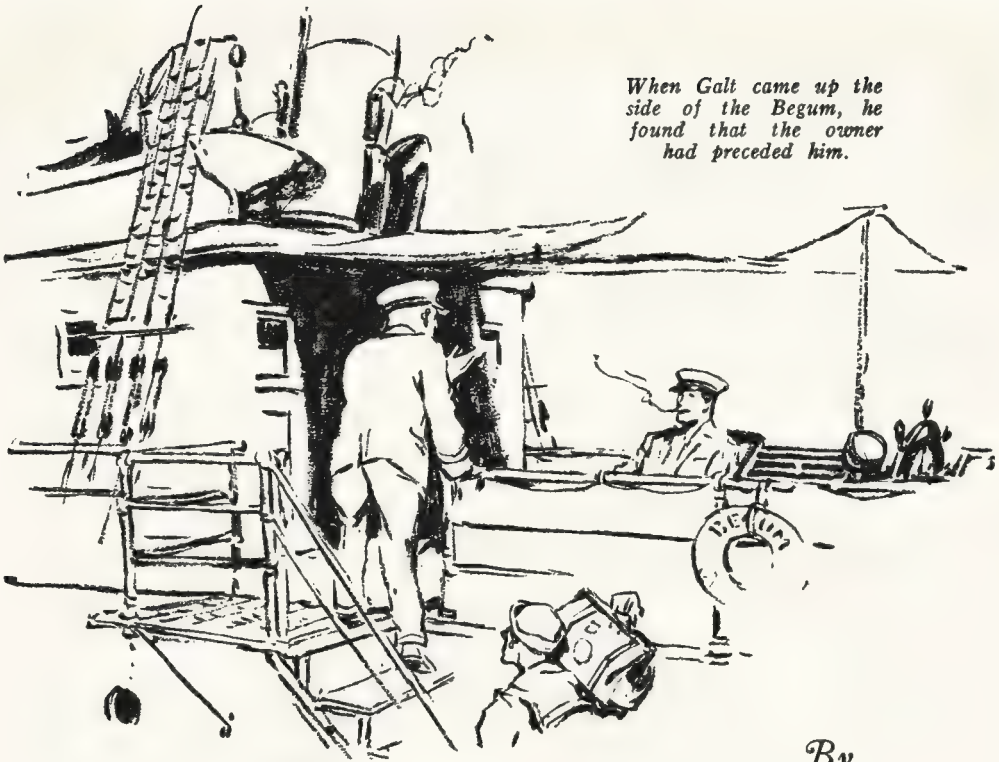
Miss Minnie leaned toward Badger. "Hon'ry, when—"

Badger reassuringly patted her well-padded shoulder. "This evenin', Miss Minnie; this evenin'."

He turned to Lem. "Lem, would you kindly give me just a little information?"

"What do you want?"

"Where is a good place to buy a weddin' ring—an' a little picture-frame?"



When Galt came up the side of the Begum, he found that the owner had preceded him.

The Gun Runner

By
CULPEPER
ZANDTT

Illustrated by William Molt

When and whither Danger beckoned, Dr. Galt was eager to follow—in this instance to a tremendously exciting adventure in tropic waters; one of the best in this fine series by the author of "Mysteries of the Sea."

THERE are beautifully kept lawns in Tanglin, around the more pretentious bungalows occupied by the wealthy Singapore merchants, but the occasional lawn-parties don't begin until the sun is pretty well down in the west, and the wind-up is a Chinese-lantern affair until dinner-time at eight or half-after. At other times one gets one's tea as often on the broad verandas as in the living-rooms inside, but the opportunities for gossip are provided, one way or another, and made the most of as in other places.

The spacious lawn at the Cromleigh bungalow, surrounded by tropic shrubbery, was dotted with white figures representing the Governor's immediate circle and plenty of other well-known folk besides, chatting of the more recent interesting

occurrences. Doctor Galt was by this time a marked figure in any gathering, owing to his exploits in the rescue of Lady Frances Harlingdean and his handling of a dangerously delicate situation up the Peninsula in Pranganoe; but so quietly self-effacing was the man that it was exceedingly difficult to keep track of him in a crowd, particularly as he had acquired the Oriental faculty of absolutely disappearing from the spot where you saw him a moment before.

Another man who had the same trick of not being where one had just seen him was Henderson Whitby—who had recently purchased an interest in a Singapore exporting-house and whom Galt had been studying more or less for the last hour. He was about to stroll across the big lawn

after Whitby when a small brown hand grabbed his white-linen coat-sleeve and gently pulled him along to a rustic seat hidden among luxuriant yellow jasmine.

"IF I let go of you for one second, Doctor, you'll not be there! That I know from experience. And I've a thirst for information even if it bores you to give it. What?"

"Oh, well—I'll take a chance, Lady Helen. Shoot!"

"Fancy! That'll be one of your Americanisms, I suppose? Oh—very good! Now, tell me, have you met a Mr. Henderson Whitby?"

"Name sounds familiar. Oh-h-h—he's that gentleman over by the striped sunshade—talking to one of the Cromleigh girls? Not?"

"Yes, that's the one. You've been introduced, of course?"

"Why—really, I don't remember. I've talked with him once or twice. Men don't pay much attention to introductions, you know, if they have anything in mind to say."

"What impression did you get of Mr. Whitby?"

"Social—or professional?"

"Both—if you don't mind."

"Well set-up man in excellent condition—far better than the average. Nerves absolutely under control—which means he drinks very sparingly, even of tea and coffee, and eats moderately. Temperamentally quick and forceful—but phlegmatic in emergencies. Won a V. C. in France, and the Croix de Guerre—which says quite a lot. I understand he's a silent partner in one of the exporting houses, but I'd gamble some that he spends little time at their godown or offices."

"Why would you?"

"Not enough action or excitement in it for a man of his caliber. I knew nothing of his affairs, but with his temperament, I'd say that he merely put some money in that business for investment, to have some sort of permanent headquarters in the Orient while he takes speculative flyers in other things which happen to turn up. Sort of man you see here today—in Hongkong next Friday—Sydney a couple of weeks later—Rangoon—Batavia—Calcutta—Nagasaki. Anywhere you happen to be."

"Sort of a rolling-stone—what?"

"By no means! Don't make that mis-

take about him! I doubt if Whitby goes anywhere without an object—and I'd bet on there being a very fair profit, whatever the object was. From what little I've heard, my impression is that he may be worth a hundred thousand, sterling—possibly more. He'd gamble on most anything, and be a good sport if he lost. But he probably wins much oftener than he loses."

"H-m-m—one would imagine those traits would make him attractive to most of you men. Why isn't he more popular with you?"

"Who says he's not?"

"Watch His Excellency or any of the Governm't lot when Mr. Whitby steps up to chat with them! They're civil, of course, but they've other matters demanding their attention. You know—that sort of evasion."

"And the women?"

"W-e-l-l—the more forward sort are crazy about him, under the surface, but afraid to permit much attention openly. I fancy several might elope with him if they were sure he meant it. The more conservative sort think he has a most attractive personality and are quite civil—but afraid of him—not quite sure of what he may do next."

"I've heard no hint, even, of anything dishonorable about him."

"Nobody has! It's admitted that his word is better than the average man's bond."

"Yes—that's my impression, from even the little I know. In some enterprises the bare word of such a man would have to be good."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Any sort of a proposition transacted with cash and no security beyond the mere word of a man who invariably lives up to any agreement he makes. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why he's not overpopular with the men, here. Whitby is temperamentally unconventional—sort of man who, anywhere beyond territorial law, might take a flyer in something technically illegal here in the Straits—carry out his part of the agreement regardless of all shore law, though I've heard no suggestions or hints in that line. But English officialdom rather shies at the sort of man who has the inclination to be occasionally 'out-of-bounds'—they're never quite sure of what he may be at. Your friend interests me, Lady Helen—I've been studying

him from a little distance for the last hour or more. Yes—liking him. He might go further in some directions than I'd care to go—but he'd do it with a smile. If he lost, he'd pay with a smile!"

"Why do you speak of him as 'my friend'?"

"Because of your interest in him. You asked me about Whitby—didn't you? Grabbed me on the lawn—hailed me off into the woods to pump me about him. Either you like him or hate him. Which is it? Are you one of the 'several who might elope' with the man?"

"Hmph! Rather *not*! When I marry a man, I'll do it openly—for all the world to see—no matter what sort he may be! And I've not yet decided whether I'll marry Mr. Whitby!"

"Does he know you're thinking of it?"

"Certainly not! Really, Doctor—you presume a good deal!"

"Possibly—I sometimes do. Inferentially, this was a semi-professional consultation. A physician isn't supposed to betray the confidence of his patients, you know—even if he isn't in practice. Does Whitby want to marry you?"

"He's never given that impression. But if I decide I want him, that doesn't make any difference—does it?"

"Might—if he likes some other woman better. How old is he?"

"About thirty-five, I fancy—and I'm twenty-nine."

"You don't look it. And he might be under or over that—but not much. Known him long?"

"Two or three years at home—before we came out here."

"Just what might there be about him that would decide you about marrying?"

"If I knew of his doing anything low, mean, dishonorable, I'd have no further interest in him."

"Suppose he entered the employ of some Malay sultan—headed a revolution for him against the existing Dutch or British governments?"

"That's hardly dishonorable, is it? He'd be risking his life for his employer, wouldn't he? As for the justice of white rule in the East, that has always been an open question, hasn't it? Who can say, truthfully or logically, that these Malay sultans haven't the right to throw off the yoke of foreign rule if they can? It was their country before that rule was imposed upon them—wasn't it?"

"Do you consider any Asiatic race fit to govern itself—except the Chinese and Japs, who are of superior intelligence?"

"Rather not! But if they prefer their own chaotic misrule to foreign rule and are willing to risk annihilation in trying to get it, who may say they haven't the right? It would be disastrous for the civilized world if they succeeded, of course—but my point is that there's nothing dishonorable in their attempt to win independent government or in any white man volunteering to serve their cause at his own risk."

"He'd be a traitor in arms against his own Government—not?"

"Well—what were your American Colonists when they signed your Declaration? The man might be a fool, heading a hopeless cause—I grant you that. But he'd be neither low, mean nor dishonorable."

"H-m-m—far as I can see, Whitby qualifies up to your specifications. So I s'pose you'll grab him—if you can. And I'll be plumb interested in watching a game between a woman who goes after what she wants and a man who, if I'm any judge, won't let any woman do as she likes with him beyond a certain limit. The average chap wouldn't have a chance against a woman of your type. But if you don't watch your step, you may lose this particular quarry—you'll need finesse."

WHEN the lawn-party guests had driven away in cars and rickshaws, Galt found that Whitby, Lady Helen and another couple were remaining with him to dine with the Cromleighs, and during the meal the ex-Army man proved exceptionally entertaining. He didn't talk about himself—but every question appeared to suggest some anecdote of absorbing interest, there being scarcely a corner of the globe with which he was not familiar. The others noticed, however, that his point of view was always the broad, far-reaching one. When a woman asked his remedy for preventing future wars, he laughed at her.

"Human nature, Miss Cromleigh, isn't completely changed about as easily as that in one lifetime. With every human being pledged to end all warfare, there still would be wars, more or less frequently, as long as the world's population increases at the present rate—it is very rapidly becoming a struggle for existence."

There was argument over this—a chal-

lenging of his statements. But he quoted figures which silenced it. Vaguely, they grasped a point of view which counted the individual as too infinitesimally small an atom to be considered in world-adjustment—and, because their attention from childhood had been focused upon the individual as being of first consideration, the man seemed to them cold-blooded—so entirely unconventional that they were a bit afraid of him.

Later, there was dancing, in which he proved a graceful adept. And then one of the men suggested poker—at which he hesitated:

"I'm afraid I don't play a sufficiently disinterested game. Poker is science and psychology—not chance. When I play any sort of game, I play to win, if I can—honorably, of course."

"Then you should make the game deuced int'restin', Whitby! The sort of player it's a pleasure to match one's wits against. There are others of us who also play to win, d'ye see. What?"

CROMLEIGH took them into his den off the living-room and produced a number of sealed packs, with one of which they began their game. Whitby kept chipping for several rounds without attempting to go after any of the pots—then he raised the ante on one. Galt raised it a little more, having some hope of bettering two pairs. Colonel Frayne was content to stay on four of a flush. After the cards were drawn, Whitby ventured a blue chip—which the Doctor saw and the Colonel raised. Then Whitby tossed four blue chips into the pot. Once more Galt stayed and the Colonel raised. At Whitby's third raise of ten blue chips, Galt tossed his aces up into the discard—and Frayne merely called. This, of course, gave Whitby no chance for another raise. He was tossing his hand into the discard, with a grin, when the Colonel stopped him.

"Just a mo', old chap! I paid to see your hand, y'know."

"Oh—I beg your pardon, Colonel! Look at 'em! Nothing but a pair of deuces."

"Er—thanks. They're good. I didn't fill, d'ye see—fancied you were bluffin'."

"Evidently not—if the deuces are good. You were the bluffer, Colonel—and I'd have let you get away with it. Well—well! Now we know each other's game much better—what?"

That was what they thought for the next half-hour—then they were not so sure. Whenever they called Whitby, he had 'em; when they let him rake in a pot unopposed, they had an uneasy impression he might not have been holding more than ace-high. When they stopped playing, he was three or four hundred dollars ahead—and each man knew it might have been a thousand had he cared to crowd them. There was never a doubt that he was playing an absolutely straight game—but with the exception of Galt there was also no question but that his nerves and knowledge of the game were better than theirs. When they left, he suggested to Galt that they take a double-rickshaw down to the Singapore Club overlooking the harbor, where they found a comfortable corner on the upper veranda for brandy-pegs and a final smoke.

"Are you living here, Whitby?"

"Hmph! I fancy it might be difficult to find any chap who'd propose me! You'd not care about it, for one—eh?"

He asked it as if the question were merely of academic interest.

"Might—when I've known you longer. Staying at the Raffles, I suppose? Hotel's well enough—but you'd be more comfortable here—"

"With most of the other members scarcely goin' beyond ord'n'ry courtesy? Any club's rather a tight little world for that sort of thing!"

"But—what the devil's the matter with them? There's not a single word I've ever heard against you!"

"No—they're careful as to that, because they jolly well know I'd take up any question of slander in a jiffy! But, d'ye see, they all fancy I play my own game regardless of the conventional one—an' they just can't understand any chap goin' outside of established custom if it suits him to do so. They know I've made a good bit of money out here, but they don't know how—an' that annoys 'em—seems too deuced irregular. If they hadn't some idea as to the size of my balance with the Hongkong an' Shanghai, they mightn't even care about speakin' to me."

"I suppose there's money to be made all through the East—some of ways perfectly legitimate—some not considered so."

"Hmph! If they're actually criminal, one would lay himself open to arrest an' imprisonment at the first port he entered. If he steers clear of that, keeps outside

of it, what does it matter whether folk consider it legitimate or otherwise?"

"Nothing—to anyone but the man himself. It would result in a good deal of the same cold-shoulder that you appear to be getting here without any good reason for it. If that sort of thing doesn't annoy you, I can't see that it matters to anyone else."

"Galt, I'm takin' quite a fancy to you! Possibly, down inside, we may be of the same temp'ram'nt—though you're by way of bein' one of the most popular men in the Orient, an' I seem, apparently, the opposite of that. How far would ye go in a bit of speculation that promised a profit of five hundred per cent?"

"If it interested me sufficiently, I'd go about as far as the law might be stretched to cover it—but I wouldn't defy public opinion too far, because that would destroy any influence I may have among both natives and whites. If I really have any, it's valuable in an emergency."

"I see! Well—I may run across something to int'rest you within those limitations. Speaking frankly, I'd like to have you with me in a few enterprises, Doctor! There'd never be a question as to where I'd find you when needed. Er—you an' Lady Helen seemed a bit thick this afternoon? Fine character, that! I admire her immensely—knew her at home before comin' out here."

"Then you probably know something of her ideas concerning men. I don't remember just what led up to it, but she gave me a pretty clear notion of what she'd stand for in a man—and the reverse."

"Aye. Fancy I know something of her ideas. She'll not abide a sneak, for one thing—any sort of bounder or rotter. On the other hand, she's much broader-minded than the average Englishwoman—would overlook some things the others would not. An' if ever she fell completely in love with a chap, she'd stick with him through thick and thin—against the whole world, if need be."

"H-m-m—that sounds worth having a try for. Might be just my luck—who knows?"

"You might do vastly worse, old chap," replied Whitby. But he looked a trifle disgruntled at this unexpected rivalry.

AFTER Whitby had gone, there was a soft padding of footsteps along the veranda. In another moment a good-

looking Chinese appeared like a ghost alongside Galt's deck-chair to say that his room was ready for the night. The Doctor had fetched Ling Foh down from Pranganoe with him and, along with a powerful Burmese whose life he had saved, he now had two personal retainers who were, mysteriously, always within call. Both were convinced that he was secretly an influential member of the Great Tong—and worshiped him accordingly.

Galt had been going over in mind everything that Whitby had said that evening—piecing together scattered remarks until he was positive that his recent acquaintance had made him a tentative offer to share the profits of some risky proposition if he cared to go into it.

"Ling Foh!" he called.

"Aie, Tuan."

"You have seen the Tuan Whitby—would you know him anywhere?"

"Aie, Tuan Hakim."

"Then—seest thou! In one day—two days, a week—the Tuan goes on a journey. This side, that side—who knows? Before that, he will speak with many men—and women. I would know with whom he speaks—something of what is said. When he goes, I would know where—and for how long. Catchee China boy train-side—boat-side—to send back chit your side. Catchee pidgin that one. Can do?"

"Can do, O Tuan."

NEXT morning Galt was strolling along over Cavenagh Bridge after breakfast when a rickshaw-wallah pulled up alongside for his passenger to speak with him.

"Mornin', Galt! You're lookin' uncommon fit. I say, nothin' particular on hand for the next hour or two?" Colonel Gillespie was supposed to have been transferred to His Excellency's staff at Singapore as a matter of personal friendship, but the Doctor knew him to be one of the most efficient officers of the Indian Secret Service.

"Why—no, Colonel. What's on your mind?"

"His Excellency is havin' a bit of discussion with me an' one of the staff at ten, d'ye see, an' he suggested askin' you to make one of the party if I happened to run across you anywhere. Which meant, of course, that I was to find you if possible an' see if you were disengaged. So—call another rickshaw an' come along

up to Governm't House—there's a good chap."

"What does the Governor think I've been doing, now?"

"Oh—it's not compulsory, you know! If you don't care about it, say the word, an' I'll be goin' on!"

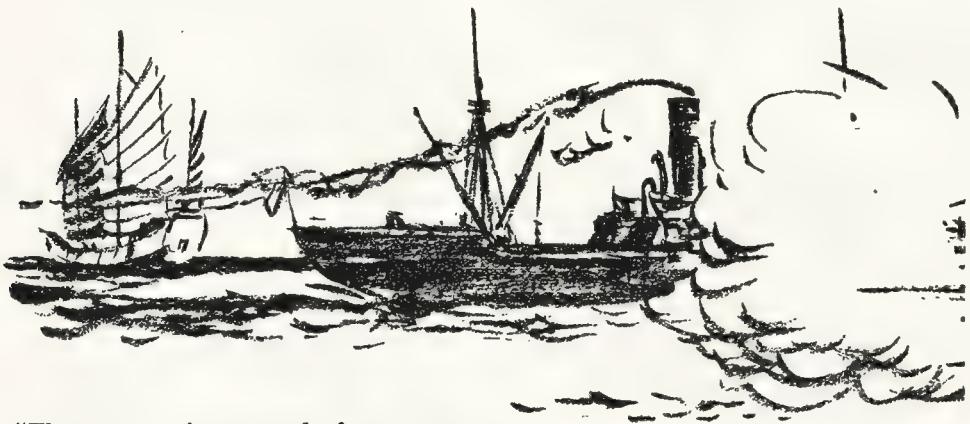
"H-m-m—touchy this morning, aren't you? Liver, I suppose—and I've given you hints enough, Colonel. All right—I'll go up with you."

When the four were locked in the privacy of the Governor's morning office, he asked Galt a number of questions concerning the political conditions he had found in Pranganoe, up the Peninsula.

in reserve, in the jungle. Fighting through the almost impenetrable undergrowth up there, he probably wasn't far out in that impression—an attacking force would have been fooled."

"You think the Sultan will not import another lot immediately?"

"Well—we sent all we took down to your arsenal, here. Which leaves His Highness with only what he's permitted to have for his bodyguard. He may try for another lot—but your Secret Service ought to confiscate that, en route. Before we left, however, Sulieman Abbas seemed to have a lot more respect for the British Raj than during Dysart's stay in Koelin-



"There was quite a stand of arms concealed in two of the native houses, I believe, with a hundred rounds of ammunition, which you very cleverly got possession of under their very noses. Any idea where those arms came from, Doctor?"

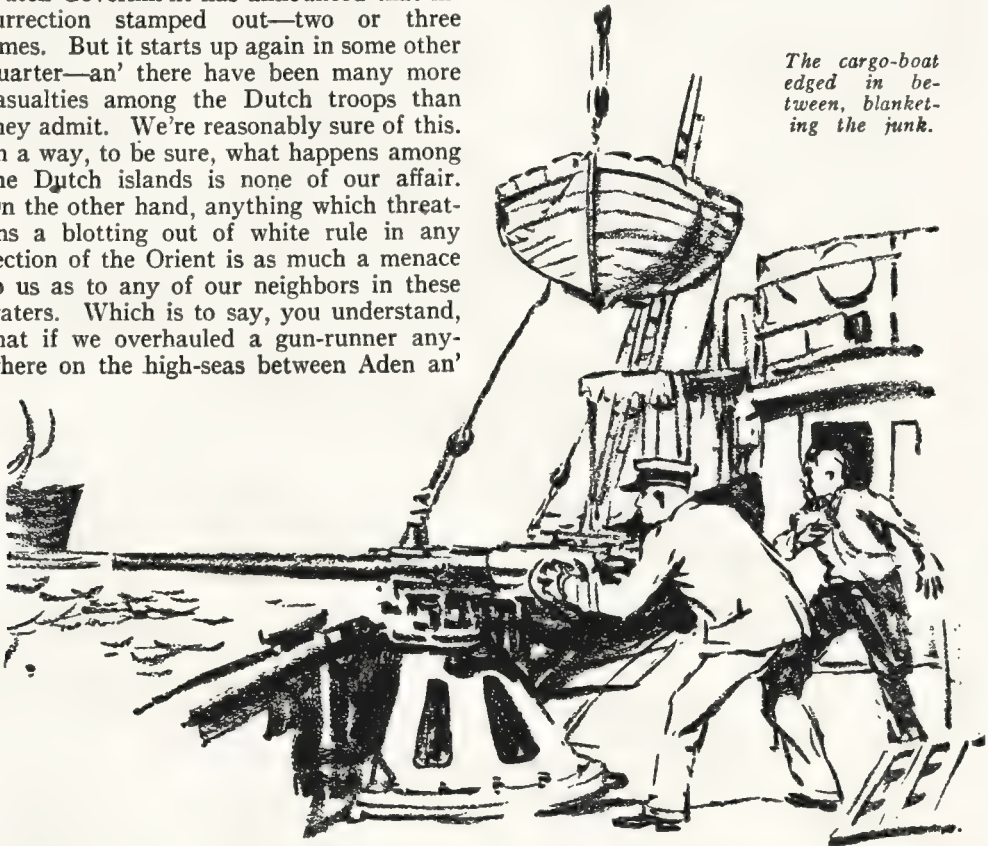
"Yes; they were made in Russia—but whether they came from the Baltic or Vladivostok, I had no means for ascertaining. It wasn't a large shipment—would have armed possibly eight hundred of them, with half a dozen machine-guns that might have blown to pieces when used. We kept them ready in case of attack, until we came down the coast, but I wouldn't have risked having our own men use them unless we got into a jam. From what I could learn, the Russian agents must have charged the Sultan five or six hundred per cent—he certainly was in no mood to spend another such sum until he thought he needed the guns. He and his *datos* probably figured upon the moral bluff of eight hundred men armed with modern weapons—giving the impression that there were ten times as many

jan. If your new resident is the right sort, I doubt if you have further trouble in that district for a long time—there would have been none had I stayed, as His Highness requested."

"Gad! I wish you could have done so! We'd gladly have winked at the question of nationality because of your splendid work with the bubonic an' cholera! However, what we're tryin' to check up just now is the source of what little gun-runnin' there is in the British Protectorates. In every case it turns out to be Russian—so it's no more than the same old story we're dealin' with along the Indian frontier—persistent Soviet erosion under the surface. An' that brings us to another question which doesn't affect us directly—the gun-running in Dutch territory. The arms landed in Java are said to have been from the Soviet also—but Gillespie has turned up some evidence that the bulk of them actually were of German, Italian and Spanish manufacture

—even small lots made in the States an' England. I fancy there were more comparatively unused Mausers an' machine-guns salvaged from the war an' hidden for years than anybody dreams of—in the hands of speculators—for sale to gun-runners of every sort. Well, d'y'e see, the Dutch Governm't has announced that insurrection stamped out—two or three times. But it starts up again in some other quarter—an' there have been many more casualties among the Dutch troops than they admit. We're reasonably sure of this. In a way, to be sure, what happens among the Dutch islands is none of our affair. On the other hand, anything which threatens a blotting out of white rule in any section of the Orient is as much a menace to us as to any of our neighbors in these waters. Which is to say, you understand, that if we overhauled a gun-runner anywhere on the high-seas between Aden an'

pays for them in good money. It may be diametrically against the policy of the Western power exercisin' a protectorate over him—but he's a sovereign ruler just the same. The British Governm't, for example, could not say that a sultan in one of our own Federated States had no



The cargo-boat edged in between, blanketing the junk.

Hakodate, we'd confiscate his cargo—whether or no!”

“And arrest the master—or the man in charge of the shipment?”

“M-well—we'd have to go softly as to that. We'd need very definite proof as to the complicity of any man on board. The master, for example, would be ordered by his owner or charterer to pick up cargo in one place an' discharge it in a specified other place—if he carried out his orders, he's not accountable. An agent on board would be in much the same position—ordered by the shippers to deliver cargo to certain consignees at a certain spot. Which fetches you up against legality of purchase.

“A Malay sultan may purchase arms an' munitions where he jolly well pleases, if he

legal right to purchase what he wished—even though we'd prevent him if we could. You catch the point, of course? It lets the gun-runner out, as far as legal procedure goes. On what charge could we arrest an' bring action against him? Eh? He's not a pirate! He's not usin' the arms himself, against anybody. He's merely a commercial chap, shippin' cargo from one place to another—not particularly interested as to how his cargo is used once it's off his hands, as long as his bills an' freights are paid. You might catch such a chap in the China Sea with arms an' munitions in his holds—yet there'd be nothin' to hinder his walkin' the streets of Singapore afterward—entirely unconcerned.”

“I thought both maritime and interna-

tional laws covered that point in some way or other?"

"Only with pretty wide discretionary powers upon the part of the Governm't boat overhaulin' such a cargo on the high seas. As a matter of fact, unless a belligerent, I doubt if such a boat could legally confiscate unless within the 'three-mile-limit.' The master an' the shipper would have grounds for action if the cargo were taken on deep-water."

"Rather nice little problem—keeping such arms and munitions out of mischief. Eh? Suppose I'm coming along in a deep-sea yacht and run across a cargo-boat loaded with arms? I order the master to dump 'em overboard. He says: 'Go to hell!' I plunk a five-inch shell into his hull and sink him. Just what is my status in those circumstances?"

"Assuming that you positively *know* those arms are on board?"

"Of course!"

"Act of piracy if you do it on the high seas—because you never could prove the cargo or its destination, with the boat on the ocean-bottom. But congratulations, under the rose, if you follow him inside any three-mile limit, see him beginning to discharge—an' then do it!"

"Wouldn't he still have grounds for civil action against me for wanton destruction of boat and goods?"

"If you were a private person, on a yacht—aye. Prob'ly no question as to that. But if you'd had the forethought to procure letters of marque signed by the authorities in those waters, that would let you out."

"Even in Dutch waters?"

"I fancy the Dutch political assigned to the Straits Governm't would be willing to issue such letters for you—if you were acting upon information and belief that you could spot a bit of gun-running along their coasts. My word, Doctor! We rather hoped you might have some opinion to offer when I suggested your conferrin' with us this morning. If it just happens that you've turned up a bit of unexpected evidence, we're most fortunate! Do you really know anything about this gun-running mess among the Dutch islands? It seems to be increasin'—Gillespie fancies the whole proposition is bein' handled by one exceptionally clever man who's makin' a small fortune out of each shipm't."

"Just at the moment. I know absolutely nothing beyond the Russian proposition

among the British protectorates—but I've what we'd call in the States a vague 'hunch' that I may turn up something within a week or so concerning the Dutch gun-running. If I do, I'd be rather inclined to take a hand myself—just because a doctor naturally hates to see a lot of human lives sacrificed needlessly. Theoretically, these Malay sultans have every right in the world to fight for their absolute independence. But coming down to cold fact, there's too much jealousy among them to get together and put up any sort of a concerted fight. Psychologically, they haven't got the nerve permanently to defeat white forces. So their fighting merely amounts to useless sacrifice of both white and brown, and their territories are far better governed for them by the Western powers. Now, if I do start after anything, it'll be rather suddenly. Suppose you give me whatever authorization I might need and get one from the Dutch political, right now? If I've no occasion to use them of course the papers will be returned. Eh?"

"We'll not argue very long over that, Doctor—you shall have them at once! I fancy my entire staff will agree with me that you have our entire confidence in anything you may see fit to do. The Straits Governm't is under obligations to you as it is."

THE following week Ling Foh asked the Doctor if he would run out to Keppel Harbor with him in a launch—as he had something to communicate which he was taking no chances of having overheard. And he proved to have a very good working knowledge of a petrol motor—the man was really worth a good deal higher wages than he would accept from Galt. They talked in fragments of "pidgin" and Malay-Dutch, but the gist of it in understandable English was this:

Henderson Whitby had gone up the Peninsula by rail to Penang, had taken one of the small Koninklijke boats, there, for Sabang, the coaling-port at the north end of Sumatra, where he went aboard a cargo-boat which was taking coal-ballast for Lombok, the inference being that some rather valuable cargo was to be picked up there—possibly high-grade ore-matrix of some sort. Whitby had talked with a Malay at Sabang who was known to be an agent for one of the Borneo sultans—and had been heard to mention, two or three times:

"Pulau Roepat Strait—night of the 22nd." This little island of Rupert or Roepat on the Sumatran coast, opposite Malacca, Galt knew very well—that being the rendezvous where he had rescued Lady Francis Harlingdean from her abductors. The mainland, like most of the Sumatran east coast, was low and covered with jungle-growth—the little passage back of the Island having fifteen feet of water in the channel at high-tide for something over two miles south of its mouth, and there were no *kampongs* nearer than twelve or fifteen miles—no village of any size within fifty. If Whitby—on a cargo steamer which had brought case-goods from a German port to Rangoon and had been chartered there by him to pick up a Lombok cargo—deviated *en route* for a mysterious night-stop in the little passage back of Pulau Roepat for the purpose of meeting some one, or some other boat, the occurrence was suspicious enough to confirm a good deal of what Galt had inferred concerning the attractive speculator.

IT was then the morning of the 26th—two days before the presumable rendezvous at Pulau Roepat—and as Ling Foh swung the launch around into Keppel Harbor, they saw the deep-sea yacht *Begum*—belonging to Carnaby Dawson, a wealthy retired merchant—lying at anchor over near the Pulau Brani reef. This yacht had been loaned to the Doctor by her owner for the purpose of rescuing his cousin Lady Frances, and it was known that Dawson always kept her in readiness to leave port at an hour's notice even though he might stay ashore at one of the clubs for months at a time.

Galt's thinking processes were high-gear'd—it usually took him but a very few moments to consider a number of different factors in a proposition and reach a decision. In this case he instructed Ling Foh to make Johnston's Pier at full speed—they were back in the Singapore club within twenty minutes. Here, he telephoned the Tanglin Club and learned that Carnaby Dawson had just come in for tiffin. Calling the nearest available motor-car, he ran out to Tanglin at once, being invited by Dawson to join him at tiffin when he appeared. After a few moments of general discussion, he said:

"Dawson—where do you stand on this gun-running proposition?"

"Hmph! Governm't should put a

stop to it if it runs to a couple of million, sterling! Damme! They're but playing with the question, now—an' it's a demmed sight more serious than they seem to realize! Let but enough of the brownies arm themselves with modern weapons, an' they'll drive the whites out of Asia by sheer force of numbers! It's rank folly, temporizin' with a menace as serious as that!"

"Suppose I wanted to borrow the *Begum* again for a little cruise in these waters—with a possibility that I might want to use the two five-inch guns on her, or the four machine-guns?"

"H-m-m—I doubt if her insurance would cover any damage sustained under such conditions."

"But if I were carrying letters of marque, the Government is supposed to make good any damage from such causes? Not?"

"Aye—but where would ye get the letters of marque? They'll not be handed out for the askin', d'ye see. Sort of thing very rarely done in these days!"

"Well—I got mine for the asking. You might look 'em over." He took a couple of official-appearing documents from his pockets.

"My word! You're a bally wonder, Galt! I doubt if there's another man in the Straits who has the confidence of two governm'ts to that extent! Are ye in earnest about chasin' some gun-runner—if ye happen to see him?"

"Why, I thought some of doing that—if I can manage to get the right sort of a boat within the next three or four hours. She'll have to be a deep-sea boat—possibly good for twenty-two knots in moderate weather. Of course I'm not exactly figuring upon looking for a needle in a haystack. A pal of my China boy's sent him a radio from Sabang in some code of their own which they managed to get through. And I've more or less confidence in the tip."

"By Jove! Have ye, so? H-m-m? An' ye really mean that if ye get the chance ye've nerve enough to sink a ship-m't of arms? Eh?"

"If I see or can chase 'em into territorial waters, you can gamble on it. If not, I might try a bluff on the high seas."

"Very good, old chap! Ye may have the *Begum* within two hours if ye wish—on the same conditions as before. I'm to go along as passenger an' get my bit of

excitem'nt out of it—you to be in absolute command—an' we divide the runnin' expense while at sea. Would ye risk takin' my cousin Lady Frances along? She's a rippin' sport, as ye know—an' she'd certainly be runnin' no more risk than when ye found her in the hands of those scoundrels—"

"They wouldn't have harmed her, physically—"

"That's nons'nse, man! Ye know it!"

"Well, but—suppose we do spot a gun-runner, and he fires on us? She might easily get killed—or badly hurt!"

"Aye—an' so she might ashore!"

"Fact is, Dawson—there's a rather sordid side to this gun-running, as most everybody looks at it. Well—suppose we turn up, just by chance, some chap Lady Frances knows—and likes? Rather embarrassing, don't you think?"

"All in the point of view, Galt—all in the point of view! Ye'd be amazed, sometimes, at the way a woman will look at a thing."

"Oh, well—fetch her aboard if she wants to come badly enough. But it's understood you'll tell her distinctly that she may be killed or hurt. No fooling! You agree?"

"Oh—quite so! May not locate her in time, anyhow—pretty short notice, ye know. What time will you be aboard?"

"Not later than three—and I'll want to pull out at once."

WHEN Galt came up the side of the *Begum* from the launch which had fetched him out, he found that the owner had preceded him by half an hour and was comfortably stretched in his deck-chair under the after-awning. Lady Frances, he said, was stowing luggage in her stateroom but would be on deck, presently. The sailing master came aft for orders almost immediately—evidently, like all the crew, well pleased to be temporarily under the Doctor's orders again. A cruise with him was likely to be anything but a tame one, as they knew from experience.

"Glad to see you again, Masterson! Get the hook aboard and head up the strait until dark—then we'll figure out the course again."

It was dark before they finished dining—with an overcast sky and a hint of rain which made the shore-beacons unusually clear but left the atmosphere out in the strait so black that they would have hit

any craft without steaming-lights about as soon as they saw her. Galt had ordered all lights doused except the starboard and port lanterns and the one on the fore-stay—even masking the ports and shutting off the bulbs in the companion so there would be no reflection when the door opened. He could have made Pulau Roepat by the following noon had he run at full speed, but he didn't want the yacht seen in that neighborhood by daylight and preferred being on the safe side with a leisurely ten knots in weather as black as that. From time to time he strolled along the rail forward, to make sure they were not getting too close aboard some other craft. From a traffic point of view, Malacca Strait in the vicinity of Singapore resembles Times Square to some extent—it's not what one would call a lonesome place. As he stood leaning upon the rail, he became conscious that a woman's shadowy figure had approached in the darkness and was leaning there by his side. He supposed of course that she was Lady Frances.

"What put it into your head to come along on this sort of a trip, Frankie? Didn't you get enough excitement when they carried you off?"

"From what Frances told me about that experience, it must have been rather thrilling. We both cornered Carnaby Dawson, one evening, and made him promise that if ever you borrowed his boat again, he'd see that we came along—somehow."

"Lady Helen! For the love of Mike! I never agreed that *you* might come along! Where the devil have you been since we left port? Had I seen you aboard, I'd have sent you ashore—packing!"

"Yes—that was my impression. So I stowed away in the stateroom I usually occupy when Dawson invites us for a cruise, and had my meals in there until we were pretty well out. You see, you're getting something of a reputation out here, Doctor. I could mention several women—and a number of men—who'd pay any reasonable sum for an invitation to cruise with you."

"But—dammit—this is likely to be a pretty sordid business, girl! No romance about it! I'm after a gun-runner, this time—going to prevent his landing a shipment by force of arms if necessary. Just a bloody, ugly business all round!"

"Aye. Carnaby told us, after we'd left port, though I for one suspected something of the sort when I heard you'd bor-



Jerking his pistol from its holster, Galt fired—a split second ahead of the other man.

rowed the *Begum* on two hours' notice. Well, I'm curious to see what a gun-runner is like. Not much question as to his nerve, is there? As I understand it, his game is not to fight back at you, but to land his shipment under your fire if it works out that way. If he's delivering it to any purchaser who has a legal right to buy—a Malay sultan, for example—it's a perfectly straight legal transaction, and you have no legal right to fire on him. But he knows that no white court would consider that plea against the int'rests of the Protectorate Powers—and stakes his life to carry on his trade against the risk of being blown out of the water."

"Pure sophistry, girl—you know that as well as I do. If he lands arms and munitions, it means destroying human lives by the thousands—without a chance for the insurrectionists to win—leaving conditions exactly as they were before. A useless, needless sacrifice of life!"

"Carnaby says if enough of the natives were armed with modern weapons, they'd win by sheer force of numbers."

"You'd have to arm four hundred million adults to do it. No, when the East is capable of self-government, Asia will get it—without very much bloodshed. Not before."

THE girl didn't answer this. From her impressions of Galt, she thought he had as much of the broad, far-reaching point of view as another man who had been a good deal in her mind of late—

was convinced that conventional standards would have no more weight with him if he decided upon a course he thought was right. Yet where the other man might do pretty much as he pleased regardless of strict adherence to the law, the Doctor would stop to consider whether any sacrifice of law or life was worth the ultimate object to be gained. If he did think so, he'd go ahead with the sacrifice as calmly as the more lawless one.

Next evening, they were lying pretty close in, along the Sumatran shore, with every light doused—sounding every ten minutes to be sure they were not too close. Passing the island of Pulau Roepat just before sunset, they had made out with their glasses a Malay junk lying at anchor about two miles up the little strait behind it—and Galt had told them that he expected a shipment of arms to be transferred to her from a four-thousand-ton cargo-boat which might run in there after dark. As it turned out, he was right. Shortly after eight-bells, they made out the steaming lights of a boat not more than three miles from the shore—something more than a mile outside of where they lay in the darkness and silence. When this craft was fairly in the entrance to the little strait, her master doused his lights and commenced sounding for the channel, which he seemed to know pretty well from previous acquaintance. The junk, meanwhile, had hoisted a single red-lantern to her masthead—so that the two boats were soon alongside.

The *Begum* was equipped with two electric-launches which could do fourteen at a pinch, with their twin screws, and do it without a sound. Mounting a machine-gun in the bow of one, Galt, accompanied by Dawson and Ling Foh, slipped noiselessly up the strait until they were close enough to see, in the faint reflection from masked incandescents, the transferring of case after case from the steamer's hold to that of the junk. When the Malays began throwing matting down on the cases, and covering their hatches, the Doctor figured that the cargo-boat master had transferred about all his steamer would hold in addition to the coal-ballast known to have been taken aboard at Sabang, and he at once ran the launch back to where he knew the *Begum* must be lying—it took him several minutes before he located her in the darkness. Then they saw the steamer come out, turn on her steaming-lights when fairly abreast of the island and move off down Malacca Strait at not more than half-speed. Dawson and the women naturally supposed that the Doctor would now run the yacht in behind the island and sink the junk—but he pointed out several things they had altogether overlooked.

"There's not more than fifteen feet of water in there at hightide—and they've no intention of landing the stuff. If they were sunk there, they'd salvage every case, not much the worse for the wetting—and there's no point in arming the Sumatrans just now, anyway. Not enough whites on the whole island to put up much resistance against a native attack in force—they're leaving Sumatra as one of the easy jobs after they've cleaned out the centers of white population on Java and Borneo. What I'm after is to locate the districts where arms are being landed right along and then sink the shipment in much deeper water than we've got here. My impression is that most of the arms for Java were first landed on the Borneo coast and then taken across, one case at a time, in small *prahus* or even catamarans."

MOVING up to the mouth of the little passage, they waited there until just before daybreak when the launch reported that the junk was coming out. Slipping along outside of the island, they presently saw the junk sailing off in a southerly direction with rather amazing speed for a craft of that sort. Some of the junks

are exceptionally fast sailers, but extra speed is frequently obtained with an auxiliary petrol-motor.

All day they kept her in sight, lagging behind as if the yacht made no pretensions to speed, but studying her through their glasses until familiar with every patch on the bamboo-ribbed sail—every light-colored mark on hull or spars. As darkness came upon them with tropical suddenness, the *Begum* spurted ahead and rapidly overhauled her quarry until it was possible to line up the dark square sail against the stars without being seen. Before daylight they fell back again. By the next night it was certain that the junk was not making for Singapore or the passages into the China Sea. Not having landed her cargo on the Sumatran shore further up, it was a fair supposition that she wouldn't do it in one of the river-passages to Palembang. She would hardly risk it anywhere along the Batavia end of Java where the population was so very much denser. Which left only some reach of the Borneo coast or one of the small islands east of Java—Galt was inclined to discard the Borneo possibility on account of the sparsity of population and distances the arms would have to be transported.

During the next five days, he was sometimes ahead of the junk, sometimes astern or on her beam—but he never lost sight of her, and as many boats are painted white in the tropics, the Malays could not be certain that any particular one was dogging them. Eventually they edged in after the junk at an isolated strip of beach on the island of Madoera—and the Doctor grinned as he explained to the others that it was the only spot on the China Sea where there was any depth of water close in shore.

It was a nice calculation to figure when the junk passed the three-mile line outside of a deep cove and stop her before she reached shallow water, but Galt hit it about right in twenty fathoms—pitching a five-inch shell just ahead of her bow. The Malay in command knew that if he didn't stop he would be sunk with the next shot, but had considerable faith in a cargo-boat which had been approaching with a good deal more speed than she appeared to have—so he cast off his hal-yards and let the big sail come rattling down. The Doctor was beginning to have his suspicions of the cargo-boat, which must have been waiting in that neighbor-

hood, but had no idea that her master would dare interfere when the yacht was flying the Dutch Naval Reserve flag as his letters of marque gave him the right to do—and lost a first advantage which he might have taken by getting alongside of his quarry. Instead of which, the cargo-boat edged in between them—blanketing the junk, which immediately hoisted her sail again—got out several long sweeps—and desperately tried for shallow water. Running into the yacht's radio-cabin, Galt—now positive of the tramp's identity—called with the key:

"Elsa. . . . Elsa. . . . Elsa—Steamer Elsa!"

"Acknowledge—Elsa. What do you want?"

"You're interfering with Government craft—active service. Get out of the way or we'll disable you."

"Since when has Dawson yacht Begum become Dutch Government craft? Disable us and take consequences—Admiralty Courts. You've no legal right to interfere with peaceable merchantmen."

"All right—if you insist. Go astern at once. You're in territorial waters."

RUNNING out to the forward five-inch gun on the fo'c'stle-head from which Masterson had stripped the tarpaulin covers, Galt swung it around on its swivel mount until the sights were squarely on the Elsa's screw and rudder—then fired—smashing the rudder completely and the screw-shaft at the boss. Shoving the engine-room telegraph over to "*Full Speed Ahead*," the Doctor rapidly ran the yacht forward and swerved across the Elsa's bow until his gun covered the junk, beyond—which hadn't made over a quarter-mile inshore during the proceedings. But as he was sighting along the junk's waterline—hoping to avoid killing any of her crew—a man came hurrying up on the cargo-boat's fo'c'stle-head, less than eighty feet away, and started to swing down on him with an automatic. Jerking his own pistol from its holster, Galt fired from his hip—a split second ahead of the other man. The bullet passed through the man's forearm, knocking the automatic from his grasp. Immediately on top of the pistol-reports, came the roar of the five-inch gun—its shell blowing a great hole in the side of the junk, which sank under water in seven minutes. The man on the tramp's bow had been gripping his arm with

bloody fingers—a grimace of pain on his handsome features—but he now picked up a megaphone which lay near the capstan, and called over:

"You win, Doctor! I really didn't think you had the nerve to do it! Sorry you happened to be on that end of the proposition—I'd much rather had you with me! That was corking good shootin'! Er—if you don't mind, I'll come aboard an' let Schmidt get this boat into Sourabaya for repairs, any way he can. This arm seems to be rather in your line. I see you're sending a launch to do what you can for those chaps from the junk. If Soela Pranku happens to be in one of those shore-boats, would you mind askin' him to come aboard an' see me?"

WHITBY was coolly improvising a tourniquet with his handkerchief to stop the bleeding, as he walked aft to where Schmidt had lowered an accommodation-ladder for him—and, though in considerable pain, he presently stepped aboard the Begum with a smile on his face which changed to a look of utter astonishment as he saw the two girls under the after-deck awning, where they had been watching the proceedings with a good many thrills—the reaction coming to them later.

"I say, Galt! Fetchin' Lady Helen along was hardly playin' the game, you know!"

"It certainly would be—if I had dreamed of such a thing! She stowed herself away—knowing I'd have put her ashore if I'd seen her in time! Ask her, if you like! Lady Frances got Dawson to beg an invite for her, against my wishes—and in any case is merely one of the innocent bystanders, not mixed up in this at all. Now—come below! I anticipated a few possible casualties and laid out my instruments before the circus started. If neither of the bones is smashed, I don't think we'll have much trouble with that arm."

As Galt finished sterilizing and bandaging it,—the two girls insisted upon helping in any way they could,—Masterson came below followed by a tall, educated Malay in conventional "whites," telling the Doctor in an undertone that there were six badly hurt men on deck awaiting his services. Galt instructed the sailing-master to fetch them below in ten minutes, and turned to order the women out of the saloon just as Whitby fished a thick wad of Bank of England notes from an inside

pocket and handed them to the tall Malay—asking him to count them over, which the man deliberately did. All of them saw that there were twenty thousand pounds in the wad—but when they maintained a well-bred silence about it, Whitby smilingly explained:

“Soela Pranku bought some goods from me, for his employer, which it was impossible for me to deliver—so he naturally gets his money back, and that closes the transaction.”

GALT wouldn't permit the ladies to remain below while he operated on the wounded Malays, though they'd had some training in nursing—but they got a close view of six badly-mangled natives when they came out of the companion, and they saw three bodies floating slowly past the yacht. It was an object-lesson which began to soak in. Before it was time for dinner, the saloon had been thoroughly cleansed until there was nothing to suggest the ugly work which had been done there.

Later that evening, when the party sat down to eat, Dawson was admitting to himself a good deal of apprehension concerning Whitby, whom he was beginning to like better than he ever had before, in spite of his academic objections to what he supposed the man's trade. Upon one point at least, there was no question whatever—Whitby was a dead game sport wherever you found him—and that strongly appeals to a man who admires such qualities. Presently, he said:

“Er—I say Whitby, old chap! I'm sure Galt will do anything I ask him, in reason—an' there's nothing to prevent our runnin' up to Saigon if we like—French territory, you know. Fancy nobody'll go after you there! Seems unnecess'ry to go back an' give yourself up, d'ye see!”

“Er—don't think I catch what you're tryin' to convey, Dawson! There'll be no question of givin' myself up—to anybody—for any cause whatever. I'm simply going back to the Raffles until Galt's satisfied that my arm's all right—then I may run up to Hongkong for a bit of rest. I'm supposed to give my Comp'ny's affairs some attention, you know.”

“But—but—damme! That junk, you know! That cargo-boat!”

“Which was innocently takin' coal-ballast to Lombok, as anyone may see while she's being repaired—an' which none of you ever saw before. Makes no dif-

f'rence what you may fancy you saw—you couldn't swear to her—you'd not even try. As for the junk, what the deuce have I to do with the junk? We happen along on the *Elsa* an' see you tryin' to bully a lot of poor defenseless Malays—naturally, we interfere as any decent mariners would. The only harm done to anybody in this affair is distinctly up to Galt—an' he'll have to accept the responsibility! Not one of you have the faintest shadow of proof as to what that junk had on her. You made no attempt to wait and search! In twenty fathoms, she's not worth expensive divin' operations—so you never will know what she had on board. I say! Just for the joke of the thing, I've almost a mind to sue Galt in the Adm'r'lty Court for damage done to my chartered boat an' for wanton attack on a peaceable junk with serious loss of life. I could, ye know—because he hasn't a leg to stand on in legal action.”

“But—that twenty thousand pounds! We saw it!”

“Naturally. It's always a good precaution for a man to have witnesses in a purely cash transaction. But what had the money to do with either the steamer or the junk? I'm quite positive there was no mention of them between me an' Soela Pranku! Eh? Correct me if I'm wrong.”

LATER in the evening Whitby and Lady Helen were chatting in their deck-chairs pretty well aft—where the others couldn't hear them.

“Henderson, when you came aboard this afternoon, you told the Doctor that fetching me along—as you then supposed—was taking an unfair advantage. What did you mean by that?”

“Oh, I suppose there's no harm in tellin' you now—when there'll be no question as to my losin'-out. Of course I never had a chance—but this little circus would have settled it. Now it's over—fact is—well—those poor dead Malays have rather spoiled the game for me. Er—d'ye know—I think Galt improves on acquaintance!”

“I agree with you—perfectly! He's another good loser!”

In doubtful amazement, he bent forward to look into her face.

“My word! D'ye—d'ye really mean that, Helen?”

There were starry reflections in the dark eyes. The beautiful lips were slowly upturned to meet his own.



The first of a notably amusing series by the artist in humor who produced the Winnie O'Wynn stories and "The Easy Street Experts."

Captain Cormorant Proposes

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

"NOTHING could have been more civil and gentlemanly than the way the secretary wrote to my wife, to express his regrets that the committee wasn't able to accept her offer to take the part of *Venus* in the Classical Handicap—I mean, Pageant—owing to their already having made arrangements for the part of *Venus*," said Captain Cormorant to a few friends in the smoking-room of the club at Havensea. He wiped his mustache. "And it only shows you what a low hound the man must be to think it humorous to go about the town afterward saying that he'd sort of planned to offer her the part of the *Gorgon Medusa*!"

Few of them had ever heard of the *Gorgon Medusa*, but they agreed with the Captain—a distinguished visitor to their seaside town. He continued:

"When a lady shows sufficient public

spirit to volunteer for these affairs she ought to have every encouragement, and it is by no means creditable to the organizers to have turned down a lady like my wife. Naturally, she treats it with contempt, but it rankles. As she said to me this morning: 'It is not as if I were tied to the part of *Venus*. There are other parts. I would have accepted *Diana*, or *Minerva* or *Ariadne* or *Circe* or *Andromeda* or *Psyche*—'

"But, Captain, honestly now, she isn't quite one's idea of *Psyche*, is she now?" said young Everman, who, being articled to an architect, was for some obscure reason regarded as rather an authority on the classics.

The Captain leveled his monocle in a glassy gaze upon Everman.

"That is a matter of personal taste and fancy," he replied, "and although I don't claim that my wife is any *Psyche* or

Venus, I'll say this—my wife's worth three thousand pounds a year and she's beautiful to me. She's a noble woman. If every other man who lived on his wife's means, as I do—God forgive me!—were as happy as I am, this world would be a better place, my boy!

"I proposed to my wife in the dark," he continued, after selecting a cigar from the assortment a steward offered, snipping off the end of his cigar, and paused impressively. "I say I proposed to Mrs. Cormorant in the dark, and I've never regretted it. I don't say I should have proposed to her in the daylight so quickly—but it would have made no difference in the end, for daylight or dark, nothing can conceal that noble woman's beautiful nature nor can any criticism alter the fact that she pays income tax on three thousand jimmies per annum."

HE paused a moment to deal with the remaining contents of his glass and adjust the extraordinarily long, drooping mustache which, after his great Roman nose, was his most salient feature.

"In any case I hold that if a lady is cunningly gypped out of the part of *Venus*, the least the secretary can do is to offer her the part of *Psyche*. Particularly so when she is prepared to send a contribution of ten pounds to the Pageant."

He produced an elegant note-case from which he extracted a check.

"There it is," he said. "Ten pounds payable to 'bearer.' Had the secretary been a sensible, tactful man, with a kindly disposition, like mine, he would have offered her, say, at least, *Helen of Troy*, and received this identical tenner. As it is,"—he smiled sadly and put the check away,—“I sponged on my lady-wife for it—Lord help me!—and she let me have it cheerfully.

"I suppose I'm not beautiful enough to be offered a part in the Pageant," she said.

"Beautiful is as beautiful does, my dear," I said. "And the first man I hear impugn your personal charms I shall cripple for life."

"So she gave me the check.

"I will say for you, Lester, that you are the best husband any wife ever had, even if you are unmoral," she said.

"Unmoral?" asked Taylor, the mayor's brother. "How d'you mean? Immoral is the right word, I take it?"

The Captain smiled.

"No, Taylor; you take it wrongly. No less immoral man than I am draws breath. I'm non-moral—I haven't got any morals, good or bad. I'm not a good man, because I haven't got any moral principles—but I'm not a bad man, because I haven't got any immoral ideas. It is the way I was born. And it's a terrible affliction. An unmoral man such as myself comes into the world doomed beforehand to a life of extreme misery, dull wretchedness, and continuous unhappiness. You, gentlemen, who have to work, more or less, for your livings are happier men than I, who get practically everything I need for the mere humiliation of asking my wife—God forgive me!—for it. I suffer the torments of the damned every day and all day, owing to having been born unmoral."

Smilingly he took his now brimming glass from the attentive steward.

"The torments of the damned—no doubt of it," he said.

"From boyhood upwards, and in all parts of the world the unfortunate omission of morals from my make-up has made life tragic for me. As a boy, I, with my little companions, was wont in our innocent rambles to 'codge' apples from a big orchard near the village—full of grand old Quarrenden trees. One day we were caught.

"But he was a fine old sportsman, the farmer, and he let us off upon our each giving a solemn promise never to take another single Quarrenden from the orchard. I kept my word. From that day till the time I left the village by request I never touched another Quarrenden. But I found an orange pippin tree in a corner of the orchard nearer the house, and it kept me tolerably well supplied most seasons. I made friends with that farmer's dog—an unmoral dog, I found out, heaven help it. I've never regretted the bushels of pippins I've had off that tree—I never shall. It's one of the penalties of being born unmoral, as I was."

THE CAPTAIN shook his head. "My wife knows my infirmity," he added. "In fact, it was due to it that we met. Had I not been born a victim of this incurable affliction, I might never have met, or known of, the noble woman who now, to my shame be it said, supports me with such royal generosity, and encompasses me with such an enviable atmosphere of affection and plenty."

"How did you come to meet her, Captain?" asked Taylor.

Captain Cormorant smiled.

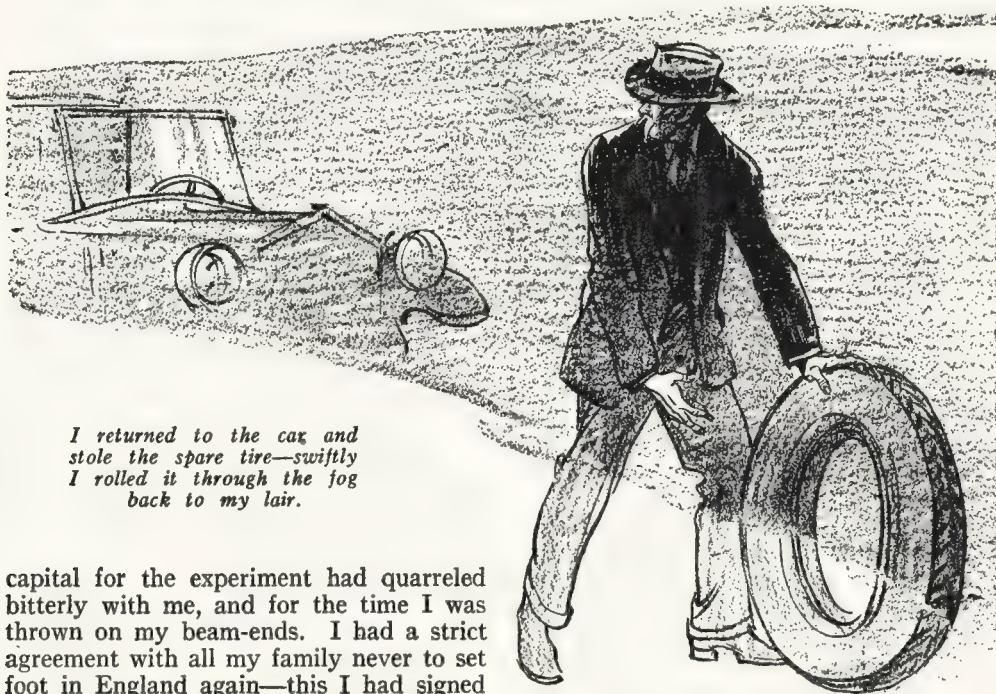
"Well, it's an interesting story, and as you all know my tragedy, there is no harm in telling you."

He settled himself down more comfortably than ever.

IT was some years ago (he then continued), and I had landed in England fresh from a terrible failure to establish a big llama run in Patagonia. The young fellow who had advanced the bulk of the

cealing the fact from his creditors. An extremely moral man himself, Dailey had from the days of his youth entertained for me a species of admiration which was practically violent. It was so profound that he did not try to imitate me or to model himself upon me—which was a very good thing for him. He appeared to believe that I was too shining an example for him to copy. In his humble way Dailey had often proved himself a very good friend to me—usually to his loss, poor fellow.

I was, then, sponging upon this old re-



*I returned to the car and
stole the spare tire—swiftly
I rolled it through the fog
back to my lair.*

capital for the experiment had quarreled bitterly with me, and for the time I was thrown on my beam-ends. I had a strict agreement with all my family never to set foot in England again—this I had signed some years before in consideration of a small sum, paid to me for leaving the country, I am sorry to say—and consequently I could not apply to them for financial aid.

I was having a very rough journey indeed. I was plowing a lonely furrow, and it was on stony ground. The times generally were hard—very hard. Even moral men were feeling the pinch—and for an immoral man things were truly awful.

I remember I used to sit in an attic over a garage in the neighborhood of Bedford Park which was run by a man called George Dailey, an erstwhile whip of my late father's hunt. Poor Dailey, he was a bankrupt himself, and so was his business, but so far he had succeeded in con-

tainer of our family for shelter. Do I understand you to ask for particulars of my family, Taylor? Very well, I am not ashamed to say that my father was a baronet, and the younger son of the fourth Earl of Wrotonborough. I was his youngest, and least successful, son. You would not think so, perhaps, to look at me and to remember the depths to which I have sunk, but it is so. Yes, gentlemen, it is well on the *tapis* that an accident to a couple of my brothers may yet transform the lady—whom that measly haberdasher of a secretary considered a perfect *Mедуsa* for his piffling pageant—into Lady Cormorant; or a prolonged series of calamities, into the Countess of Wroton-

borough. But, as I was saying when Taylor interrupted me, I was having a very bad time, at the expense of poor faithful Dailey, and it was quite obvious that something had to be done—and done quickly.

There came a friendly fog. It was not the worst kind of a London fog, but it was sufficiently putrid. On the evening of this fog I decided that I would not run up to town—partly because of the fog, but mainly because I possessed only the meager sum of ninepence. Dailey had had a bad week, and he could not manage more than a loan of ninepence that day. I spent the evening sitting in my attic, breathing in the odor of petrol, rubber and exhaust smoke which characterizes these establishments, planning my next attack upon the impregnable fortress of my family's finances; and at perhaps half-past ten I decided to stroll out to the local hostelry and have a modest drink. This I did. Bedford Park is a quiet place at the best of times. That night, enwrapped in its heavy clinging cloak of fog, it was like a deserted suburb of Ghostland. Nothing moved, nothing was to be heard. One could see, perhaps, two yards in front of one, but no more. Cutting through a side-street on my way inn-ward, I came upon a big motorcar drawn up at the side of the pavement—a very good, almost new Arrowhead landaulet.

I paused a moment to admire the car. Peering at it through the dense fog, I perceived that there was no chauffeur with it. I looked inside. It was empty. I glanced at the gate before which it stood. The gate was closed. Why this should strike me as curious I am unable to say, but it did.

I continued my investigations. I went in through the gate, up to the house. The house was silent and unlighted. Evidently the occupants had all gone to bed, or were out.

I stood on the lawn, listening. But I heard nothing except the drip of water from the fog-bound trees and shrubs.

I returned to the car and stole the spare tire, I am ashamed to say.

SWIFTLY I rolled it through the kindly, sound-muffling fog, back to my lair, deposited it in my attic, lit a cigarette, and went out to get the refreshment I had originally planned. It was still quiet, and the fog was denser than ever.

On my way I had, of course, to pass the car—that beautiful Arrowhead landaulet.

The chauffeur, I observed, had not returned.

There it stood, alone, unattended, its lamps sending rich, warm beams of light into the clammy curtains of fog. They were magnificent lamps. The headlights were a pair of very fine self-contained acetylenes—this was slightly before the advent of electric headlamps. I—er—pinched them forthwith. You begin to see now, gentlemen, what a tragic thing it is to be unmoral? One is never safe from temptation. A kleptomaniac lives in perfect safety compared with one who, like me, has been born unmoral.

AS I say, I secured the lamps for myself, also a very charming little carriage-clock on the dash—merely a matter of a couple of screws or so. (The toolbox was unlocked, yes, Taylor.)

I journeyed again to my attic. It was beginning to get quite a well-furnished look. The clock went admirably upon the mantelpiece.

"Lester, my boy," I said to myself, "you have deserved a little modest refreshment; yes, indeed."

And I sallied forth into the chill silences of the fog again.

It was in the immediate neighborhood of the Arrowhead landaulet that the silence and loneliness were most marked. It was, indeed, so silent and so lonely that it would have been ludicrous to leave the speedometer—a very fine bit of work—upon it.

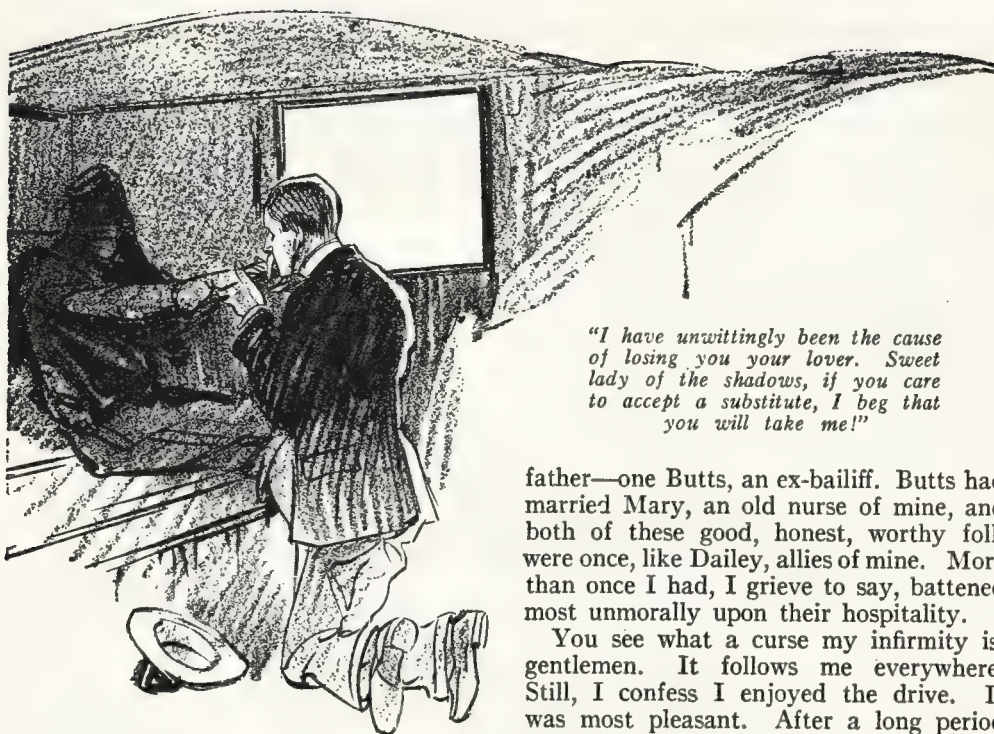
So I collected it, took it home, and returned to the car for the magneto. After all, why leave a good magneto?

To a man of my experience it is a matter of seconds to take the mag' out of a motor, and especially out of a car which is notoriously the most "accessible" car on the market.

Rendered confident by my unexampled run of luck, I had opened the bonnet, when it occurred to me that I was wasting time.

Why do the thing by installments?

It would take me a long time to remove the car by fragments. Skillful with the mechanism of the motor as I was, nevertheless, I should inevitably have trouble with the transmission, and if not with the transmission, then with the engine.



"I have unwittingly been the cause of losing you your lover. Sweet lady of the shadows, if you care to accept a substitute, I beg that you will take me!"

Why not take the car? It would be simpler and save time. I reflected: I needed a car. Here *was* a car—complete except for a spare wheel, headlamps, clock and speedometer. And I knew where to get these accessories. I replaced the magneto, and pondering, cranked her. She started, ticking over as sweetly as a pleasant dream, murmuring a little happy song to herself.

I got into the driver's seat, and took off the handbrake. It worked very sweetly. Evidently a fine example of Arrowhead enterprise.

I depressed the clutch pedal—it worked like velvet—and delicately dropped the gear-lever into first speed. I gave the accelerator a touch, let in the clutch, and lo, we glided dreamily into the fog, practically without sound. It was all very disgraceful.

I had got a good car, and I knew it.

I DECIDED to take myself for a run into the country. Pausing for a brief moment to collect the headlamps and to throw a few things into a suitcase, I drove the Arrowhead quietly out of London and away into the country.

I was making for a certain village not far from Basingstoke, where on a retired farm in that rather spacious, lonely district, dwelt another old retainer of my

father—one Butts, an ex-bailiff. Butts had married Mary, an old nurse of mine, and both of these good, honest, worthy folk were once, like Dailey, allies of mine. More than once I had, I grieve to say, battered most unmorally upon their hospitality.

You see what a curse my infirmity is, gentlemen. It follows me everywhere. Still, I confess I enjoyed the drive. It was most pleasant. After a long period of roaring, jerking motor-busses, of grinding trams, of earthy tubes, it is a very great luxury to travel in a really good, well-made car. At any rate I found it so.

I took it easy in the town, but I pushed her rather when we had come out into the country.

We went purring sweetly through the clear, cool night, for the fog we had left behind; and I confess, gentlemen, I had never enjoyed a drive so much before. I could have sung—indeed I did sing—a scrap or so. Old favorites of mine, "*I would that my love would silently flow—flow like a beautiful stream,*" and that other exquisite thing, "*Oh, that we two were maying!*"—which always brings the tears to my eyes; that wonderful song, so sad, so wistful—

FOR one fleeting moment the voice of the hard-bitten old adventurer faltered, and the heavy-lidded eyes grew absent. The mask was off.

"*Oh, that we two were maying,*" he repeated, staring down God knows what dim, beautiful, rose-decked vistas of the past, perhaps to seek or to see again some lovely ghost of his youth, long vanished, who would never return. Then his eyes cleared again, and he resumed:

Yes, it was very—pleasant. Then, a few miles from our destination some little trivial thing went wrong with my right

headlamp. I stopped, got out to adjust it, and as I did so I received the surprise of my life.

"Are we not nearly there, Roy darling?" said a voice, so musical, so soft, so caressing that for a moment I could not believe it human.

I was on a lonely stretch, so that a glance both ways assured me that there was nobody in the road near enough to be seen—yes, it was moonlight, Taylor—and I was wondering whether I had not imagined it when the voice came again:

"Roy dear, aren't we nearly there?"

It came from the interior of the landaulet, gentlemen, and for a moment my legs felt as though they were made of pure leather.

A lady in the car I had stolen! A lady who called me "Roy darling!"

Evidently this little matter of procuring a new car was to be rather more complicated than I expected.

I HESITATED—on the point of bolting for it. But I am not good at bolting, so with a violent effort I went to the door of the car, and removing my hat, looked within.

Either there was no interior light or it had failed, for the inside of the car was in a moon-ameliorated darkness—moon-ameliorated, Taylor, is a literary touch merely—a fanciful way of saying that the darkness of the car was lightened by the light of the moon. I was perhaps a little carried away by the romance of it.

In the silvery shadows of the warm gloom, scented with the smell of fine leather upholstery, of some rare and costly perfume, of delicate femininity—in that enchanted gloom, I say, I saw yearning as it were to me, a woman's face seemingly white as pearl, gleaming through the dusky folds of a veil.

"Roy darling," she said, in her matchless voice, "I'm tired and nervous. Shall we soon be—home?"

Home! A pang struck through me as I remembered that if she were the owner of the car and of a severe and vindictive nature, I should shortly be in a place not at all like home.

I bowed my head.

"Alas, dear lady," I said, in my very best manner—which on account of my breeding is naturally rather good, "there is a—misunderstanding. When I drove this magnificent car away, I was wholly

unaware that it was freighted with—shall I say—loveliness so rare that it is only equaled by the music of the voice by which it makes its presence manifest. I believed it to be an empty car, deserted, abandoned in the fog, maybe, by some wealthy man whose nerve may have failed him, and who, rich enough to abandon the car as a mere bagatelle, had left it and consigned himself to the care of a taxi-driver. In the hope of securing the reward which he might later offer for the recovery of the car, I was driving it to a safe place."

It was pretty thin, yes, Taylor. But, heaven forgive me, that was the hashish-dream I wafted toward the owner of that white, half-seen, half-guessed face and that glorious voice. Also it was, maybe, a trifle theatrical. But a touch, a *souffçon*, of theatricality usually goes very well with a lady.

She sank back, gasping.

For a moment there was silence. Then I heard a low sound—a catching of the breath. She was sobbing. It went to my heart.

"Ah, do not weep, I entreat you, dear lady, do not weep," I implored her in my best voice, which, on account of my experience in such matters, is pretty good. I *tremolo-ed* it a little. "Had I but dreamed that you were in the car I should not have touched it."

"But why—oh, why *did* you touch it? You have done a great deal of irretrievable harm."

"Each word you say, dearest lady, stabs me anew," I said. "You speak of irretrievable harm, but give me leave to put the car and its exquisite freight back where I found it, and I will drive if need be through the jaws of—er—Hades to do it. Try, O lady of the moonlight, try to regard me as your willing slave, as a machine which will do in all respects exactly what you command it to do—no more, no less."

"It is too late," she said, in accents of real despair. "What is the time? Look at the carriage-clock."

I feigned to look.

"Alas, dear lady, it would seem that one of those dastards, those wolves in human form prowling through the fog in London, has stolen the carriage-clock, for it is gone," I explained. "But as to the time,"—I made a guess at it—"it is close upon midnight."

"You have utterly ruined me!"

"I am utterly ashamed," I said humbly. She seemed to key herself up a little.

"You have spoiled everything," she said; and the richness of her voice seemed to have changed subtly from the mellow richness of a ripe pear to the sharpish richness of not-quite-ripe grapes. It was still fruity, you understand, but there was a touch of acid in it. "You have wrecked my plans!"

"Heaven forgive me!" I said.

"You have destroyed my prospects of happiness!"

"I crawl in the dust at your feet," I answered abjectly.

"You have crushed under your heel the delicate fabric of a woman's carefully built-up romance!"

"I will repair and make good the evil I have done," I said.

"That is impossible," said she in tones of despair.

"May I humbly—most humbly—ask why?"

"I was—eloping," she said, her voice becoming tender again. "For certain reasons it was necessary for us to have my car brought round to the rear entrance of my house. I was to enter it quietly, and in a few moments my *fiancé* was to come, quietly take the wheel, and drive away. When I saw you take the driver's seat so quietly, I thought you were Roy."

GENTLEMEN, I assure you my hair crisped with horror at the thought that while I was so blithely disassembling that car in Bedford Park, building up, as it were, my little home, two people were edging in, converging on the car. It was amazing that I had not been—well, nabbed. As it was, so singular are the means and methods of Fate, I had myself nabbed the lady.

Dismissing an unworthy inclination to smile at the thought of that poor devil "Roy darling," waiting for the car back at Bedford Park, I pulled myself together, opened the door of the car, and stepped in.

She did not forbid it.

Her hand, gloved in a soft, whitish leather, lay on her lap, and I ventured to place my own upon it.

"Lady of the moonlight," I said, rather thrillingly, I fancied, "what am I to do—what am I to say? I have, inadvertently and with the best intentions, torn you and Roy asunder. You tell me that the disaster is irretrievable, and in so

far as Roy is concerned, I fear it is. For I see, dear lady, that you have been placed in a singularly compromising position by my excess of zeal"—this took place in the era when unmarried ladies avoided compromising situations, instead of seeking them as apparently the matrimonial competition compels them to do nowadays—"and that nothing remains for me now but to make such poor amends as I may. Poor in this world's goods, dearest lady, I am—nay, I confess that I am utterly broke. But, thank God, I still have self-reliance. Deficient of morals, good or bad, I admit freely that I am—but, thank heaven, I still have manners. My reputation has long since left me, but my good taste and breeding are practically unimpaired.

"I am reduced to living in circumstances of great penury and discomfort, but my natural desires are for the best of everything—for the *recherche*. I am a grandson of the Earl of Wrotonborough, and I am free from the silken cords of any love-entanglement prior to this. My name is Cormorant, Captain Lester Cormorant, late of the Bolivian Light Horse." This was, of course, prior to the great "go" with Jerry the German, and my acceptance of a commission in the 429th Mud-Walloppers, as we all used to term the old regiment.

I pressed her hand, and she did not remove it.

"Suffer me to speak, dear lady, I beg," I continued, "and if I offend you, believe me it will only be in carrying out the duty of a gentleman—unfortunately poor and unmoral, but the grandson of an earl and the son of a baronet. Dearest lady, I have unwittingly been the cause of losing you your lover; nothing therefore remains but to do what any gentleman would do. If, sweet lady of the shadows, you care to accept, as some poor substitute for Roy, the poverty-stricken, remorseful man before you,"—I dropped on one knee, an awkward business in a landaulet,—"I only beg that you will take me!"

I sobbed a little. I thought a sob seemed to be called for.

SHE appeared to be reflecting on my offer. "Do not let the matter of poverty distress you, Captain," she said softly. "I have three thousand a year."

I dropped on both knees at once. And emboldened, I pressed her glove to my lips.

"Your lightest wish shall be my life's ambition, Moonlight Lady."

"I cannot humiliate myself by returning to Bedford Park unwedded!" she said.

"Unthinkable!" I agreed.

"And so—all being well—when we know each other a little better—perhaps—" came that golden voice through the warm gloom, faltered and stopped.

What could a gentleman do?

I did it.

Timidly, she returned my embrace.

Presently I drove on to Butt's place.

NOT till she stepped into Mary's well-lighted little parlor, hastily illuminated by my old nurse, whom I had to rout out, did I set eyes on the face of the noble-dispositioned woman who is now my lady-wife. Nay, more, my comrade.

I confess to you, gentlemen, that, on the whole, I was rather surprised; she was different, in some ways, from what the moonlight had led me to believe, and I do not deny that, like the darkness, she too had been perhaps a little moon-ameliorated. But when that is said, *all* is said. Her nature is like her voice—of purest gold. Her face—pshaw! Why this modern craze for dollish beauty, anyway? It is the curse of the country. Handsome is as handsome does. And on those lines my wife is the handsomest woman in the country.

We have been married now for a number of years, and I have never regretted it for a second. Nor, gentlemen, has she.

THE CAPTAIN finished his whisky-and-soda and rose.

"What about Roy?" asked the man Taylor.

"We never inquired and he never complained. No gentleman, evidently."

"But why did she have to elope?"

"She was under the power of a brother—a scoundrel who terrorized her with threats. He had spent his inheritance, and he desired to live on her, the black-guard. He made a scene at our wedding, and I had to half wring his neck before he could see things in their proper perspective—for him."

"How?" pursued the person Taylor.

"The proper perspective of our wedding for him was, I conceive, as he finally

viewed it from a bed of nettles in the churchyard ditch into which I chucked him."

"What happened to Dailey?" asked Taylor.

"He went bankrupt in the usual way—the usual way," said Captain Cormorant. "And now he is the landlord of a cozy inn near Pulborough, in Sussex, which—God forgive me!—I persuaded my lady-wife to buy him!"

He smiled indulgently down upon the group from his towering six feet four inches.

"And now, my good friends, I must go to the admirable lunch which, instinct whispers in my ear, my dear wife has ordered for me, God bless her—"

A MAN entered suddenly. It was the secretary of the Pageant Committee. He looked flurried and perturbed—like a secretary who has just heard that he has lost a ten-pound note subscription to his "cause."

"Ah, Captain Cormorant, I've been looking all over the town for you! I'm sorry to say the lady who was to take the part of *Psyche* in the Pageant has had to go to Yorkshire. She will be away some time. May I have the very great pleasure of offering the part to Mrs. Cormorant?"

The Captain stiffened.

"You may offer it, sir, till you are black in the face," he said. "But, on behalf of my wife, I have very great pleasure in declining it. We are not interested in your infernal pageant, my good sir. It is highly probable that we shall be returning to our town house before the affair comes off. My wife would not dream, for an instant, of accepting other people's leavings, sir; and unmoral though I may have the misfortune to be, sir, I have yet enough pride in me to uphold—with violence, if necessary—her views!"

He swung on his heel.

"Good morning, gentlemen!"

At the door he paused in the middle of a highly effective exit to hurl this verbal javelin of irony at the dazed secretary.

"But if at any time you find that you have in your silly pageant a vacancy for the characterization of the *Gorgon Medusa*, sir, pray let me know!"

And so to luncheon.

"A Flutter in Wives," a second and even more diverting episode in the picaresque career of the shameless Captain Cormorant, will be described by Mr. Atkey in the next, the January, issue.



"For years the widow has been trying to have Salome run out of Brady's Flat."

A Very Wicked Woman

By REGINALD C. BARKER

This vivid short story, throwing into sharp contrast the "paragon of virtue" and the "Jezebel" of a little mining town, is a representative picture of many larger communities.

SHE was known as Salome to the miners of Brady's Flat, but respectable women passed her with their heads held high and their lips soundlessly curling.

Brady's Flat is in Idaho. Once it was a rich mining-camp; but now it is only a collection of ramshackle buildings centered by a white church with a red tin roof, in which the wives of the men who know Salome sometimes give charity dances and basket socials for the benefit of the benighted heathen across the sea. The leader of these well-intentioned philanthropists is Mrs. Sadie Murdock, widow of the late Thomas Murdock, and consequently proprietress of the Murdock House, which has been for years the only hotel in Brady's Flat.

The widow Murdock was about fifty when I met her—tall, thin, and angular in build, with graying hair caught smoothly

back from a forehead which always looked cold. In her black eyes, set a trifle too close, was that unhappy expression common to a type of women who either deem themselves very good, or are suffering physically from a too tightly laced corset.

Yet, straight-laced though the widow thought herself, she was not above trying to find out why I had come to Brady's Flat in the dead of winter. Naturally the weather offered the easiest opening for conversation as I sat by the window of the lobby in the Murdock House gazing out at the snow-covered street.

"It was twenty-seven degrees below zero last night," observed the widow from behind the desk, where she was pretending to do something with a feather duster.

"Yes," I murmured absently, for I was at the moment interested in watching some one who was coming down the street. As the figure drew closer, I saw it to be a woman, and as she passed the window, I noticed a wealth of red hair and caught a flash from hard blue eyes.

"Who is that?" I asked the widow Murdock. "The school-teacher?" For I could

hear a bell ringing somewhere in Brady's Flat.

With unexpected alacrity the widow slipped from behind the desk and came and stood by my side. Her expression was very righteous as she gazed after the retreating figure of the red-haired woman who had just passed.

"School-teacher!" she exclaimed derisively. "No, that is the Jezebel."

"The what?" I said.

"The Jezebel," repeated the widow viciously. "She is one of them that was eaten by the dogs."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "I see." For I knew then that she was referring to the biblical story of King Ahab and Jezebel. Conscious that I had made a *faux pas*, I arose to my feet with the intention of going over to the pool hall where I might seek more congenial company.

"I suppose you are interested in mining," hinted the widow.

"Not exactly," I evaded.

THE widow eyed me sharply as I slipped into my overcoat and out of the door into the snow. Somehow I sensed that she was watching me as I strode down the street in the direction taken by the woman who had passed the window. I thought I knew what the widow was thinking.

It was warm and comfortable in Eagle's pool-hall; but being so early in the day, there was only one man there—a red-whiskered, round-shouldered man of fifty-five or sixty. He was sitting at a green table fumbling with a greasy pack of cards and apparently listening to an old-style phonograph that was grinding out a wheezy tune.

"Mornin'," he greeted as I drew a chair up to the pot-bellied heating stove. "It's pretty cold."

"Twenty-seven below zero, so I was told at the hotel," I said. Then I mentioned my name.

"You can call me Chane," he said, gripping my hand. "Jim Chane. I've lived in Brady's Flat all my life. Got hurt in a mine some years ago. Aint been able to do much since." He stretched forth a leg that was little thicker than a man's arm, and twisted all out of its natural shape.

There is not much a man can say to a man in such a case, so I kept still.

"I get a living by hunting rich pieces of gold quartz on the old mining-dumps," said Chane, garrulously. "Course the boys

would have helped me if I'd have let 'em; but I'd rather be independent."

"Nothing like it," I agreed. "Have a smoke?"

With discolored teeth he bit off the end of the cigar and accepted a proffered match; then he leaned back in his chair.

"Mining man?" he inquired.

"Not exactly," I said. "Used to be one; but now I write stories of the camps."

"Ah!" exclaimed Chane. "Ever hear the story of the parragin?"

"The what?"

"Mis' Murdock," he elucidated, "the widow over at the hotel. She calls herself a parragin of virtue."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "You mean a paragon of virtue."

"She aint, though," said Jim Chane.

I waited expectantly.

"No," insisted the red-whiskered man, "Sadie Murdock aint no parragin. Ever see Salome?"

"Once," I acknowledged. "At least I suppose it was she whom Mrs. Murdock referred to as 'the Jezebel.'"

"You see, Tom Murdock and Salome were engaged to be married 'bout thutty years ago," explained Jim Chane. "Then Sadie Murdock—she was Sadie Smith them days—came to Brady's Flat to teach school. I guess Sadie was the first real eddicated girl Tom Murdock had ever seen, and she real pretty then, though you wouldn't think so now.

"Well, Salome was only a miner's daughter, and she didn't stand no show with Tom after Sadie came to Brady's Flat. Sadie and Tom were married, and Tom built the Murdock House. They done well. The widow today is the richest woman in Brady's Flat."

"I don't see that Mrs. Murdock stole her husband from this woman you call Salome," I protested.

"She did, just the same, whether you see it or not," insisted Chane, "for Sadie and Tom hadn't been married more than six months when a baby was born to Salome; it only lived a week."

I SAT listening to the ticking of a clock on the wall.

Chane flicked the ash from his cigar.

"I'd have married Salome myself to have saved her name," said Chane, "but she wouldn't hear of it. No sir. Salome's heart was broken, and she rented an old house down among the willows at the edge

of camp, and proceeded to go straight to the devil. For years the widow has been trying to have Salome run out of Brady's Flat because she's such a very wicked woman."

CHANE paused and looked at me expectantly as though awaiting a comment.

"Come and have a drink," I invited. "Then tell me the rest of the story."

But he could not understand that he had told a story without a climax, so I left him and spent the rest of the day wandering around Brady's Flat, talking with the occasional old-timers whom I met; and I took a few photographs of Salome's house among the willows.

That night I went to bed early, for I had nothing more to do. I was awakened suddenly by some one shouting in the street outside. As I sat up, I became conscious that my room was all lighted up with a yellow glare that streamed through the window. From the street came a raucous yell:

"Fire! Fire!"

For a moment I was seized with panic, for I thought the hotel to be afire; but as I leaped to the window and looked out, I saw I was mistaken, for the glare came from the lower end of the camp, where red flames were leaping and twisting high above the willows. Men and women were running down the street.

Hurriedly I slipped into some clothes, dragged on a pair of shoes and ran downstairs. When I reached the fire, a crowd of men and women were gathered in front of the flaming ruin of Salome's house among the willows.

Nothing could be done, for already the roof had fallen in, and only the frame of the house was left. In the heart of the fire stood a red-hot iron bedstead.

A sewing-machine and two chairs had been left in the center of the street; near them stood Salome. Her heavy red hair fell all over a man's coat somebody had draped around her shoulders. Beneath the coat could be seen part of a white nightgown. Now and again she would raise a bare pink foot out of the snow as the cold bit into her flesh, but her hard blue eyes never faltered as she stared at her blazing home.

As I stood there expecting that somebody would offer the woman shelter, I heard a man speak to his wife.

"We can take her in tonight, Myra. We have an extra room."

"Take her in!" exclaimed the good woman. "Take Salome in! Think what the other women would say!"

I do not think a man in the crowd realized that Salome would freeze to death; it was only that each one preferred that some other man should bear the onus of the scorn which would be heaped upon him if he dared offer shelter to such a woman.

And so like cowards the married men allowed themselves one after another to be led home to their warm beds, until at last only the widow Murdock, Jim Chane, Salome and myself were left standing there in the bitter winter night.

"You have lots of vacant rooms, Mrs. Murdock," I suggested. "Somebody has got to take this woman in, or she will freeze to death."

"Let her freeze," said the widow callously. "It is the will of God to punish her for her sins. After her body freezes, her soul will burn in the everlasting fires of perdition."

Standing by her sewing-machine, all lit up by the flames of the burning house, Salome turned her head until her defiant blue eyes met the pitiless stare of the widow.

"Speak of something you understand," said Salome. "What do you know of hell?"

"Don't pay no 'tention to the parragin, Salome," said old Jim Chane. "You come 'long to my cabin an' stay with me. I aint afraid of the fires of hell. I've been through 'em too."

"Don't you dare!" cried the widow. "I forbid it. I'll have you ridden on a rail out of Brady's Flat."

SALOME looked her full in the face and smiled a smile I hope I may never see again. Then she slipped an arm around Jim Chane's neck, drew his old head down and kissed him full on his bearded lips.

"All right, Jim," she said. "Let's go."

Supporting each other, they tottered past us without giving us as much as a word or a look, and the widow Murdock turned upon me and spoke with virtuous indignation.

"Take me home," she whimpered. "I'm ashamed to look you in the face after what I've just heard. That wicked, wicked woman!"

The following morning I was a witness to the marriage of Salome of Brady's Flat.

*It is a fact I am a little bow-legged,
but it don't pay to mention it to me.*



The Inside Job

Remember our good friend Ed, the demon garage mechanic? Here comes his biographer, Calvin Ball, with a joyous story of a cowboy at large in the wilds of New York.

By CALVIN BALL

THE rumors heard about New York was to the effect that it's a free and easy city to live in, where you don't have to work much, and everybody wears a silk hat like the magazine pictures; and when I left the Bar-F, I says to the boys that the reason I'm heading for New York is because I want to live in a city where I can take it easy instead of working my head off chasing steers like I've been doing up to the present.

The boys says to me that when I find a place where you can live and eat and don't have to work, they will all give up prodding cows and join me, and all I have to do is write them a postcard.

So far I didn't write no postcard.

The white collar and store-clothes was the first change I made in New York, and I will say they made a big change in my appearance. Also they made a big change in my bank-roll, and when I had walked around a few weeks and wore my surplus

cash down to a ten-spot, I had to make a big change in the plans about not working.

So I looked around some, and the Hotel Dackman is where the employment agent said he would stick me in on private investigation work. So he stuck me the way he said he would.

The name the agent gave me to interview was Mr. Cotter, head of what he says was the house protective department, and the interview took place confidential in Mr. Cotter's headquarters, which was located in a fancy-looking room of big size on the fifth floor of the Hotel Dackman.

WHEN I was alone with Mr. Cotter he looked me over careful and when I showed him my references he put on his glasses and read through them like he was hiring a vice-president instead of somebody to look natural and duck work the way the employment agent told me about.

He finally took off the specs and tapped on the paper.

"It says here, 'puncher—a first-class cattleman.' Is that what you are?"

I kind of moved back on the chair. "It's

a little exaggerated in the letter," I says, "on account the boss that wrote it was an old friend and I told him what to write. I'm high-grade for my ordinary work; but what I'm looking for at present is a change. And the agent mentioned I had the right looks for investigation."

Mr. Cotter sits there a while looking at me. "Would you mind standing up?" he asks. "And turn around, so I can see you. You seem to be the type we want." And after a short space he added on, "I notice, though, you're a little bow-legged."

It is a fact I am a little bow-legged like he claimed, but you have to look close to see it, and it usually don't pay to mention it to me if I'm not feeling right.

When he finally folded up the letter he says to me, "This letter speaks highly of you. Of course your experience is not necessary in the work we have, but the man must be honest and true. Your appearance is what we want—kind of ordinary, so you'll pass as one of the employees. The work depends on secrecy."

HE explained to me in a lengthy way about the secrecy, and repeated it a good many times. "If you take the position you'll start here in the regular routine as an employee," he said. "Your work is confidential between you and me only. Say nothing to the others about it—no one. That's the meaning of confidential."

And when I told him I thought I could do this, he finally settles the matter. But before he gave up any details of what the job would be, he went to the door and opened it and looked out and closed it again, and when he came back he drew up his chair close, and he says to me that the walls have ears, and always take time to be cautious.

When he got through explaining about the hotel robbery that took place a few weeks before he told me that they think they knew who did it. "And it's a woman," he says. "She is young and has been a guest of the hotel a long time, and she is wealthy. We don't know that she is guilty. We suspect it. There are others working on the case, and you will take a job here at the hotel as a cleaner so you'll be in her suite now and then when she is out; and take notice of what you see. You'll mark it down. A letter, for instance—read it, jot down what's in it, and the address. If a package comes to her, find out all you can. Write down the labels

from her coats and so on. And take special notice of all jewelry."

Mr. Cotter says to me that I would succeed at this job, because to look at me nobody would believe I am an investigator; and he says also that the woman's name is Ellen Grant, and he believes she's the inside agent of a gang of thieves.

"I'll give you an envelope with reference in it," he says. "Apply to the housekeeper downstairs for work. Go out the front door, and walk around the block a time or two, then come back in the employees' entrance. You're looking for work. Ask for the housekeeper, and don't mention me. Don't mention anybody. You're there to get a job the same as anybody else. When the housekeeper tells you what the wages is, kick a little. They all do. Make it look real."

I kind of looks at him. "What makes them kick about the pay here?" I says.

"You don't have to worry about that," he assures me. "The housekeeper's department will pay you fifteen a week, board and room. In a separate check from this department you'll get twenty more. Now go ahead, and your instructions will come later."

When he explained that he will meet me in the evening at eight o'clock at the corner cigar-store, I left. There was something about this head of the house protective department that I didn't like the looks of. He had a smooth way of talking for one point, but I figured maybe all other detectives talked the same, as it's a snoopy business anyhow; and as I am always against anybody that mentions to me about being bow-legged, I figured this also might account why I didn't like him.

I went out to the street and down to the corner where I stood around a while out of sight—that being as good as walking around the block and less work—and later I went back to the Hotel Dackman, this time sliding in through the employees' entrance.

The housekeeper was a narrow-faced woman with a sharp voice, and she says to me that she will turn me over to the steward, and they'll put me to work in the culinary department until they investigate my reference. Culinary means kitchen. And before I could get a bearing on what's happening I was shoving around carts full of dishes, with the steward hollering at me to hurry. I didn't like it, but couldn't object about doing it on the account they

didn't know I belonged to the detective department, and as it was confidential I couldn't explain it; but I kept thinking of the one named Ellen Grant, head of the hotel thieves' department, if they would call it that, and about how I was going to meet Mr. Cotter at eight o'clock in the cigar-store.

At eight o'clock I was wore out and mad, and had been shifted from one department to another department until I finally ended up in the floor-scrubbing department, and was beginning to get suspicious whether I am a detective or whether it is only a slick plan of the hotel to get a lot of hard labor done.

There wouldn't be much time to get to the cigar-store, as when I put on my coat to leave, it was already eight o'clock. And when the steward saw me reaching for my hat he pulled out his watch.

"You're not losing any time getting out," he says to me; "doesn't it lack a few minutes yet?"

The steward was a fishy-eyed gent that I didn't like from the first, and with the way he was riding my coat-tails for the past few hours hollering "hurry up," "drop that," "do this," nobody could blame me I didn't like him.

"By the wall clock it lacks a minute and a half," I says respectful; "do you think maybe I better take off my coat and polish another spoon?"

"Not necessarily. You're a new man, though, and we like to have it understood that the hotel expects a full day from everyone. You'll be in at seven in the morning. There'll be some one here to lay out your work for you."

"There's been a good many of them laying it out for me today," I says. But remembering that I belonged to the detective section which he didn't know anything about, and was here for the purpose of copying labels and reading other people's mail if I ever get up in that department, I finally told the steward in a quiet way that the clock was now striking, and I'd be ready at seven tomorrow.

Through the cigar-store window I caught a glimpse of Mr. Cotter leaning up against the counter inside. There was a flower in his coat lapel and he had a contented look on his face.

When I stepped in, Mr. Cotter seemed glad to see me. And as some other customers came in at the same time, he took

my arm and walked with me out to the sidewalk and down the street. "The walls have ears," he repeats to me. "Always talk in the open when possible." And while he steered me along through the crowd, he says to me, "Well, how is it working so far?"

"Working is a first-class name for it," I says. He kind of looked at me, and I gave him the facts about how they put me in a white coat and chased me into the kitchen. "I haven't seen or heard anything of Ellen Grant," I says, "and I don't think the culinary department ever heard about she lives here."

When I started telling him details of the jobs the steward had set me at, I began with the first one of shoving around pushcarts, and I got as far as scrubbing out the kettle they boil soup in, when Mr. Cotter cuts me off.

"You're doing a little temporary kitchen work then—that sums it up briefly."

"You can sum it up quick enough after it's done," I says to him. "When do you think I'll be out of there?"

"When the reference is checked up you'll go into the cleaning job, and it will probably be sometime tomorrow. In the meantime, prove yourself a willing worker."

I happened to think at this point about something I wanted to ask Mr. Cotter about. In the afternoon while I was at the potato-peeler machine, and another time while I was running the pushcarts, a heavy-set man had come walking past and kind of stopped to look at me, and I couldn't figure out what this man was doing walking around that way, because I didn't see him do any work. He had his hands in his pockets like a boss, and was dressed like one, but he didn't holler "hurry up," like the rest of them never missed a chance of doing, and I figured I better ask Mr. Cotter.

"Did he have black hair?" Mr. Cotter asked me.

"Black and kind of bushy," I says, "and he didn't speak to nobody, but walked on through. Later on he did it again."

"He's all right," Mr. Cotter says. "Don't mind him; he's a house dick."

"What is a dick?" I says.

"It means he's one of our men. A dick is a detective, and he's not watching you special—he watches everybody. Don't notice him and keep working, and if he speaks to you don't tell him why you're there. Confidential is confidential."

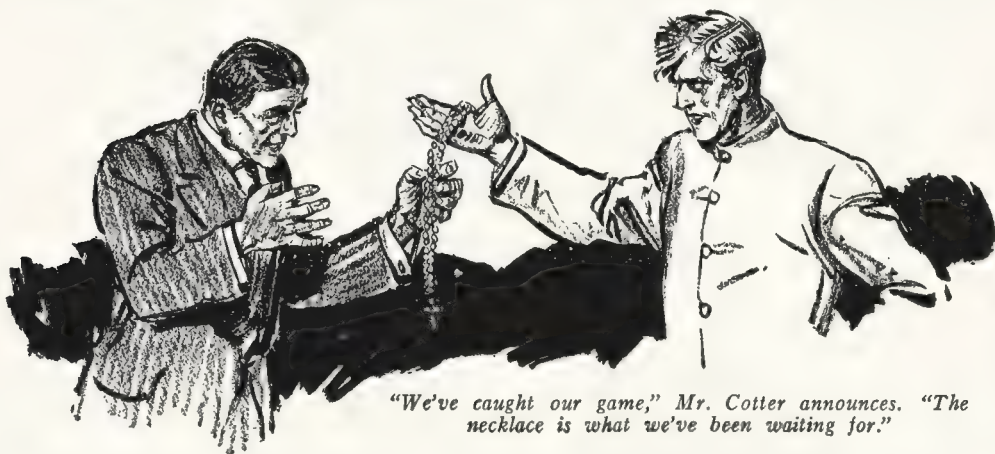
THE first chance to get a view of Ellen Grant's headquarters was when they finally put me at the cleaner job and started me off with what they call a vacuum machine, up one hall and down another, in and out of rooms, running it over everything that looked dusty, and if it didn't look dusty you run over it anyhow.

It looked to me like Ellen Grant's room had a wealthy appearance but not like a robbery hangout, and she didn't look like it herself.

She wasn't more than twenty-five, I

and pulling me from one floor to another, from the left wing to the right wing—go in this room, go in that, help the maid, go back to your vacuum, follow the janitor, run for some tacks, go back to your vacuum, wash this, skip down for some towels, get me some glue—until she had me hypnotized that I am a twenty-four-legged man, with two heads and ten arms.

And when I kicked to her about it, she says to me that my regular duty is the vacuum, but this is a hotel and I should know from experience that I am expected



figured, and young to be queen of a thief gang; but I could see she had a habit of dressing up expensive, wearing a lot of jewels that must have come from some source, maybe underhand, and also she had blond hair bobbed in New York style, and blue eyes. And when I mentioned about the eyes to Mr. Cotter, he says to me watch my step.

On account she was there present the first time I vacuumed, I couldn't copy down any labels out of her shoes and so forth the way Mr. Cotter says for me to do, but she talked to me a while and smoked a cigarette, giving me one also to smoke which was of a well-known brand, and I made a report on it to Mr. Cotter.

"There are a good many use the same brand," he says; "can't you find out something else? And don't let her get too friendly or she'll hypnotize you; you better keep out of there altogether when she's at home."

But no kind of bandit has ever hypnotized me, and the only hypnotizing which was done to me was by the Hotel Dackman housekeeper. She kept after me the next few days, chasing me through the halls

to do whatever the emergency calls for, run down and bring up the step-ladder, she says.

Every time I passed Ellen Grant's compartment when she was out, I would stop in, and if I had it with me I would buzz it over the rug a few minutes, and at the same time see what I could see, so as to mark it down later for Mr. Cotter. Sometimes I made a mistake and went in when she was home. And when this happened I would start in buzzing anyhow, until she finally gave me a two-dollar tip and told me I was the only cleaner worth two dollars that the Hotel Dackman had.

"You do the work thorough and often," she says; "the rug in front of the bureau is actually getting thin."

I looked at her out of the end of one eye, but she was looking over the room, and didn't mean anything suspicious.

Two or three times a day I saw the detective with black hair walking around the hotel, and a few times I caught him watching me kind of curious, but I never saw him doing any labor, which I decided to ask Mr. Cotter how this comes.

"He's a regular man," Mr. Cotter says

to me. "His name is Phillips; the employees know he's a detective and a good many guests know it. For special jobs we hire extras like you that no one knows. Keep your own counsel, and don't let Phillips know what you're doing."

"He takes it kind of easy," I says. "If you would tell him I am one also, it would save him the work of eying me, and make it still easier."

"Do you think he watches you more than the other help?" Cotter asks.

"He watches everybody," I says. "He walks around with his hands in his pockets, and as he never does any labor he has plenty time to watch."

"Don't worry about it, then. Your work is furnishing me information from the Grant woman's apartment, and keep at it—careful, cautious, and accurate. Keep your eyes open for jewelry, and in particular for the necklace, and if you see it, get a close description."

I already had instructions about the necklace, as Mr. Cotter told me it was a long one with a gold cross at the bottom, and made of pearls, and to let him know quick if I saw it.

I GOT more facts rapid out of Ellen Grant's room to give to Mr. Cotter when I met him evenings at the corner cigar-store, and Mr. Cotter would write them down in his book so as he could study them over later, and I took special notice of any jewelry I would see as this was what I was there for, until I finally saw the necklace he told me about.

"It checks up with our description," Mr. Cotter says; "so be on the watch to see it again. If she happens to forget it in the room, you might be able to bring it to my headquarters long enough for me to examine it, and then get it back before she returns. If she should forget it, let me know at once. But otherwise keep away from my headquarters."

Mr. Cotter says to me also that the net is closing down on her, and it won't be long now, and I said to Mr. Cotter that something ought to happen soon because I'm about wore out with hard labor, and my shoes are wore out also, and I asks him, "Why can't you tell the housekeeper confidential who I am so she'll go a little more easy, or maybe I better get roller skates."

And Mr. Cotter takes a long breath and says to me that maybe he better hire me a helper to do my work, and let me sit down

in the office with a lead pencil, and I told him this would be satisfactory but he didn't say any more and walked away.

The next day came the chance to get the necklace and take it down to Mr. Cotter's headquarters for a quick examination so I could bring it back again while Ellen Grant was still away. But I went to Mr. Cotter's headquarters first.

"She's gone out," I says, "and the necklace is in the drawer of the face-decoration table, and it's laying on the left-hand side on top a magazine, like she must have dropped it in there and forgot it."

Mr. Cotter took off his glasses. "How long has she been gone?" he asked me.

"It's about ten minutes back that she went out, and on account I saw her leaving, I slipped in afterward to look around."

"Where is the housekeeper?"

"She's up on the twelfth."

"Was there anyone else on the Grant floor?"

"I didn't see nobody," I informs him.

"All right, then; this is as good a time as any. Go and get it; but be careful. When you go in, close the door after you, and don't waste any time. Slip it in your pocket and bring it here. Walk fast, but don't run. When you get back I'll be waiting with the door part way open. You better bring your machine with you as though you're coming in to clean."

It didn't take long to get back to Ellen Grant's compartment, and slip the gold-cross necklace into my jacket pocket, after which I went out into the hall with the vacuum on my shoulder, and there being no one in sight except a maid who wasn't looking at me the way they never do look at me, I started along casual for Mr. Cotter's headquarters, taking the stairs instead of the help's elevator.

WHEN I was halfway back to the headquarters, I kind of stopped on the stairs between floors to rest a few minutes, and while I stood there feeling the necklace in my pocket, I happened to start thinking about Mr. Cotter.

Punching cows don't give you much practice in thinking things out, but I wasn't born exactly recent, and I all at once finds myself wondering how come that I am trusted like this with a valuable necklace. And why didn't Mr. Cotter fish it out of the bureau drawer himself? And the longer I stood there, the more I kept thinking it over.



*He made a mistake
when he called me a
"bow-legged fumbler";
it brought some action
that was swift.*

I never liked Mr. Cotter since the beginning. And the way he has been reminding me that confidential is confidential, and don't talk to nobody, made me think once or twice already that the job is too much confidential.

I couldn't have any suspicion about Mr. Cotter being the head of the house protective department the way he says he is, on account the employment agent sent me to him; but on the other hand I didn't know the employment man. And how come that Mr. Cotter wouldn't let me tell the housekeeper or the detective with black hair that I am also a detective?

Also I remembered what the boys told me before I came to New York—they says to me that if I am going to New York City maybe I will soon be wearing a silk hat like I think I will, and maybe it will turn out different and I won't have no hat at all to wear, and they might even get my coat and shoes away from me if I don't watch them, because New York is a swindler's roost and has got so many crookers in it that the chief of police has to hire a bookkeeper. And they says to me that the more crooked they are the quicker they can fool you.

And when I come to compare up Mr. Cotter with Ellen Grant I couldn't make a decision which one looked the most illegal. All I have got is Mr. Cotter's word that she is an inside agent for thieves; and

I couldn't guarantee to nobody that Mr. Cotter isn't the one who is the inside agent himself. He says to me that his room was the headquarters for the house protective department, but he didn't give me no proof that it was. And also he paid up my wages to me in cash bills, because he says his department don't use no checks.

While I stood there fingering over the necklace, I finally made a decision that I have never yet been an easy mark for nobody, and before I will turn over any jewelry into Mr. Cotter's hands I will demand for a fact whether he is the head of the hotel protective department as claimed, and if he is then why don't he give me a little proof.

Mr. Cotter was waiting for me, and when I got inside his room and put down the vacuum, he closed up the door to the hall. He looked kind of excited, and the first thing I noticed was his hat laying on the bed handy-like, and I couldn't remember whether it was there before, or whether he must have put it there while I was gone.

"Well," he says to me, "what's the news?"

I looked at him a little, and I finally says to him that I have got it O. K. But I didn't take the necklace out of my pocket.

"Let's have it then." And he reaches out his hand.

"Mr. Cotter," I says—and I kind of

looked at the hat and then looked back at him—"I've been thinking coming up the stairs about this here necklace, and what it must be worth on account it's made out of pearls. It would be a bad accident if anything happened to it."

"Let's have it. Let's have it," he interrupts. "Pass it over."

"What I was thinking is that I am the one that took it out of the room," I says, "and if it turns out that Ellen Grant owns it legal, and it gets lost, I could easy land up in a calaboose."

HE drops down his hand and looks at me. "What are you driving at?"

"Did you figure to have me bring it back to her compartment right away direct," I asked him, "or do you expect to keep it for examination?"

I couldn't tell whether he was surprised, or mad, or nervous, but he had his eyes on me hard.

"What do you mean, a calaboose? Did you get the necklace I sent you for?"

I didn't like to tell him flat that I wont give it up, on account I wasn't sure whether I was right or wrong; but he was standing there waiting with his hand out, so as I finally had to speak up plain.

"The fact is, Mr. Cotter," I says, "is that I have been jumping every direction anybody tells me to since I came to the Hotel Dackman, and it's been: run for some soap, skip after putty, go fetch a necklace, and do this and do that, until you couldn't blame me, Mr. Cotter, that I don't know whether I am a vacuum man, or a detective, or a comet, or I might be the inside agent himself as I've now got the pearls in my pocket. And what I would like to know is only a little reasonable facts about who is who, and I figured you could give me these facts."

Mr. Cotter folded up his arms.

"Well," he says to me, and he kind of smiles. "So there's where the trouble is! Who hired you to this position anyhow?"

"You did," I admits, "but I didn't know the employment agent that sent me here from a crow, Mr. Cotter, and I haven't seen him before or since."

"And you want proof that I am an authorized representative of the hotel. Is that it?"

"It wouldn't hurt," I says.

He smiles again. "You're cautious, and that's always a good point. And I can't say that I blame you. There's a phone

here—I'll let you speak with Mr. Dackman down in the office."

He went to the phone to call Mr. Dackman, and I stood there wondering whether I have gone too far. But there was trouble getting Mr. Dackman, and after Mr. Cotter waited a while and told somebody to go and look, he finally waited some more, and then talked to somebody and at last hung up and turned around.

"Mr. Dackman is not in at present," he says to me. "We'll get him on the line a little later. And in the meantime let's have a look at what you've got—stay here in the room if you like. It might not be the jewelry we're after, and if so you can take it back at once. But we'll look at it anyhow."

I FISHED out the necklace and handed it to him, and from the way his eyes lighted up, it was the one he wanted. He was running it through his fingers. "We've caught our game," he says to me. "Ellen Grant is the lady we want, and unless I'm making a big mistake, this is the clincher that will prove it."

But at the same time Mr. Cotter was talking, he glanced up toward the door and then back to the necklace, and I noticed he didn't move his head any, but only looked with his eyes. And the quick way he did it was like as if he kind of slipped and didn't mean it.

It anyhow made me think all at once that when he was at the phone he was standing in front so I couldn't see, and he could easy have been holding down the hook and talking to nobody at all.

"We're not going to send this back to the Grant woman," Mr. Cotter announces. "I'll talk it over with Dackman, and I think we have enough on her now to cage her. The necklace is what we've been waiting for. And you've done well. I'll speak a word to Dackman, and there'll be something in the way of a bonus for you, something substantial. When Dackman gets back, you can talk with him. I'll take you in the office. For the present it would be better if you would go ahead with your house-work as if nothing had happened."

Mr. Cotter had slid the necklace into his side coat pocket. But so far I didn't get the solid proof I asked for. And when I make up my mind, it is made up.

"I better stay here, Mr. Cotter," I says, "until I talk with somebody or see somebody, that I can find out where I am at."

"I have things to attend to," he answers like he's losing patience. "We're going to make an arrest in the Grant apartment a little later, and I don't want you to be stubborn about this. You can't expect me to sit here in the room with you."

"You could let me have the necklace," I says, "and I'll stay here with it and wait until Mr. Dackman gets back."

I was looking at Mr. Cotter and I see he was flushing up like he's getting mad.

And then he speaks up sudden. "Enough of this thing is enough," he says. "You know who I am, and I don't know what's got into you. I told you Dackman isn't in at present. What do you want me to do? You have heard me talking with Dackman over the phone. The day I hired you, you heard me phone down to him that I'd found a man to suit. Don't you remember it?"

And I was also getting a little mad myself. "I remember it, Mr. Cotter," I says, "but I wasn't watching whether you might have had a thumb on the hook or not; and I don't want to make any wrong opinions about who you are, but on the other hand I am not going to get myself in a cala-boose, and I'm going to stay here in the room till I'm sure about matters."

And when I pulled a chair in front of the door and sat down on it permanent, Mr. Cotter flew off the handle in a style that was a surprise.

The door was shut so if anybody was passing outside they couldn't hear, and Mr. Cotter kept his voice low anyhow, but he was excited, and I don't know if he started calling me names first or I started it—but somebody started it, because in a few seconds things began to happen, and it wasn't long before he got his hand caught in my jacket and tore it, and when he jerked away I had a piece of his coat.

He made a mistake when he called me a "little bow-legged fumbler," and at the same time tried to kick me on the shins, either one of which was enough by itself, especially the bow-legged part, and coming together like that it brought out some action that was swift.

I finally got Mr. Cotter down on the bed, and kicked his hat off out of sight, and I held him there until he rolled over and broke the bed, and we kept it up on the floor, and knocked over a table, and a lamp fell, and if he hadn't been so skinny he would have been tougher to handle.

But every time I got him jammed down

in a corner and took my hands off, he would pop up again and start it over; so as I finally had to drag him against one of the bedposts that wasn't broke, and tied him against the post with a sheet, and the way I put knots into it he couldn't move only his eyes.

When I took a look at the way the room was wrecked, and the lamp busted, and the mirror cracked where Mr. Cotter missed me with a bay rum bottle, I says to myself that this is a case where I better be right, or I'll sure be riding to a cala-boose.

I stood there with the necklace in my hand, and there didn't seem to be anybody coming in, so I couldn't tell whether the racket was loud enough to hear outside; but it was a time for quick thinking, which I've never been good at, and I couldn't bring the necklace back to Ellen Grant because she might be a crook, and Cotter might be one, and if they catch me having it in my pocket they wouldn't have any doubt I am one; so there was nothing left but to turn it over to Mr. Dackman and be quick about it.

THAT'S how come I brought the necklace down to Mr. Dackman's office, and found him in like I half expected. He listened to me while I explained the facts from the beginning, and when I got as far as tying up Mr. Cotter with a sheet, Mr. Dackman got up excited, and says, "You mean he's there now?"

And when I said he was, and how tight I had made the knots, Mr. Dackman pushed a bell-button for the black-haired detective named Phillips.

"Phillips is our only detective," Mr. Dackman says. "Miss Grant is a guest above suspicion. And who Cotter is, it will be an entertainment to hear him explain."

I didn't hear Mr. Cotter explain it on account they took him quiet out the back way to a police-wagon, but Mr. Dackman says I'll hear it in court where I'm going to be a head witness; and he says when it's all over he's going to give me a steady hotel job because they can always depend I will do what the emergency calls for.

But I says to Mr. Dackman that I don't think I'll take it, on account I'm going back to the Bar-F where I can chase steers—it will be a vacation compared to wearing a white collar and doing work by departments in a easy town like New York!

The Box L Mystery

By ROBERT AMES BENNET



Illustrated by William Molt

The Story So Far:

THE metropolis of the Wyoming cow-country could brag of more wealth, more tenderfoot cattle barons and more younger sons of British lords than any other town of its size in the world. Not so Bullhide, the unlovely little cow-town where one left the railroad if he journeyed to the Box L or the Double Bar ranches. And when Win Kenneth in his so-English clothes stepped off the train there, he attracted no little attention—and ridicule.

And this was quite as he had planned, for he had been employed by Jadwin K. Rowan, absentee owner of the Box L, to ferret out the cause of his heavy losses, particularly of his unaccountably small calf crops. And Ken, as his friends elsewhere knew him, thought he could best accomplish his task by posing as a tenderfoot English friend of Rowan's, come to Wyoming on a hunting trip, and naïvely eager to see the famed wild West of America. Hence the letter of introduction from Rowan to his resident manager, Clate Cheever, which Ken presented; and hence that individual's grudging but unsuspicious welcome.

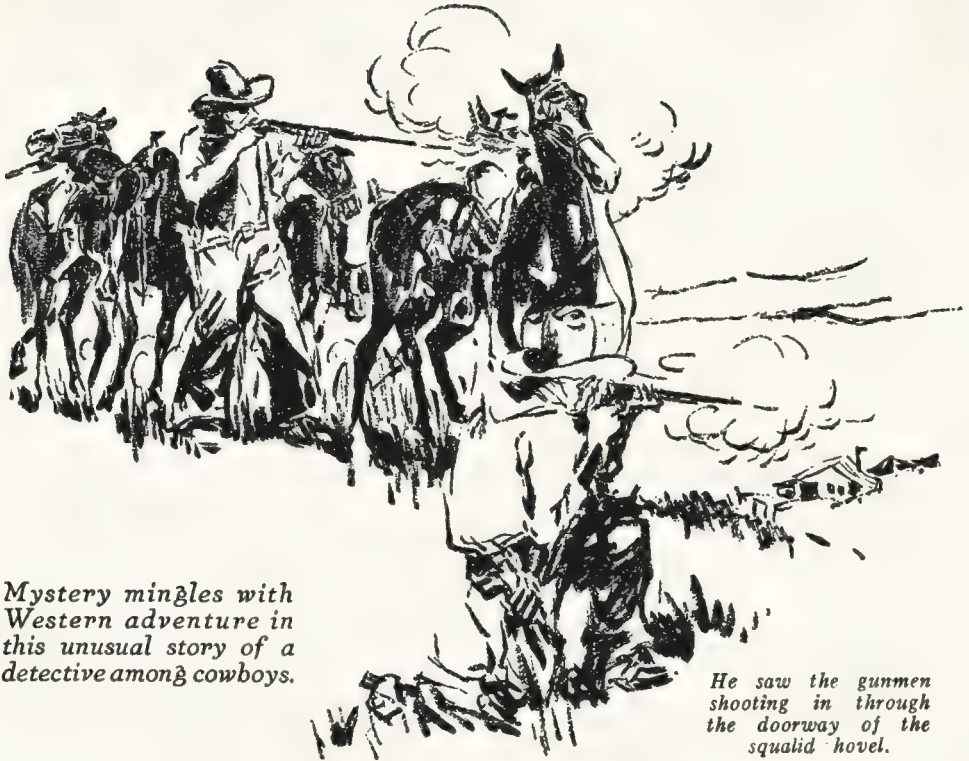
Ken's tenderfoot masquerade, however, promptly got him into variegated trouble. Alamo Gove, the hard-boiled foreman of the Double Bar, undertook to show off before his employer, Belle Forsythe, by "hazing" Ken, and came off a very second best in the encounter—an episode which apparently won Ken no favor in Belle

Forsythe's eyes. And the Double Bar, Ken realized, was part of his problem, for the girl's father had the year before been killed in an encounter with as yet unidentified cattle rustlers; the man Gove seemed to stand high in her regard for the part he had played in that battle. Cheever also, it was clear, aspired to her favor.

Under pretext of hunting Ken rode far about the country seeking evidence in this matter of cattle rustling. On one journey into the hills he was turned back by the bullets of two concealed riflemen. On another occasion he came upon a man skinning a newly slaughtered steer, but it proved to be only a poverty-stricken "nester" named Jake, who had committed the theft to feed his starving family. Pitying the man, Ken took the responsibility on his own shoulders and thus saved Jake from the swift reprisal of Gove and the cowboy Lanky (part owner of the Bar Y, a smaller outfit), who came upon the scene a little later. It was shortly after this episode that Ken, pursuing his investigations, rode with Jake to Miss Forsythe's camp at the calf round-up, and asked her aid in recovering the little herd of cattle which Jake had owned under the Diamond J brand—but which seemed likewise to have succumbed to the mysterious rustlers. (*The story continues in detail:*)

IN the morning Ken bought a good circle horse from Belle Forsythe. He gave the animal to Jake, and the nester at once

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Mystery mingles with Western adventure in this unusual story of a detective among cowboys.

He saw the gunmen shooting in through the doorway of the squalid hovel.

started riding with the Double Bar men, under the protection given him by the lady boss.

Her say in the matter was respected by the hard-faced Box L crew, as well as by her own punchers. The same proved true of Lanky and a small Spanish-Mexican called Pedro, who had come to the gathering-ground as the quota for the Bar Y.

Ken did not ride out with his hired man. He preferred the company of Belle, who spent most of her time on a nimble cow-pony, inspecting the bunches of cattle rounded in by the circle riders. No situation could have suited him better. Not only did he have the pleasure of ripening his acquaintance with the most fascinating girl he had ever met, but his genuine eagerness to be with her made a perfect cover for his own inspection of the round-up.

He at once convinced the lady boss that he was fast learning the ways of the cow country. This more than offset Gove's gibes at him as a greenhorn. Goaded by jealousy, the hot-headed Texan overplayed his hand. Instead of turning Belle against the "dude," his bitterness over

his new rival made her all the more gracious to the visitor.

By the end of the third day Ken knew that he had risen more than a little in the girl's esteem. But along with this he learned other things less gratifying. His tally of the Box L cattle rounded in by the circle riders showed a strange shortage of cows in proportion to steers. There was a still more marked shortage of calves, especially early spring ones. Both the Double Bar and the Bar Y had a much larger ratio of cows and a fairly good calf-crop.

ON the forenoon of the fifth day Ken casually remarked to Belle his surprise that her branders had so much more work to do than the Box L crew. She smiled at him approvingly.

"You'll make a regular cow-man some day, if you keep on. You've at last noticed your outfit's lean calf-crop. I saw it the first day, and asked Al about it."

"Oh, I can guess the answer, Miss Forsythe. It's Indians, wolves and those other stock-robbers you call rustlers."

"Crack shooting!" she bantered. "Three

misses in one shot! No Indian off reservation, wolves thinned out by our riders, and every rustler in these parts run off or strung up."

"Then how about my friend Rowan's calves?"

"Simple enough. Al says that Clate thought conditions for cows were better last winter over toward the north end of the Box L range. He aimed to keep all except the dry cows from drifting down this way."

"Ah, I see," replied Ken.

As a matter of fact, he saw far more than the girl. Fair as was the Box L calf-crop up north, it by no means balanced the shortage down here. The total average was far below normal. The number of Box L cows also was below what he had a right to expect.

In line with the Box L shortage was a no less significant though small fact: The several days of range combing had brought in only a hundred cows bearing Jake's Diamond J brand—most of them calfless.

So far and no farther Ken had progressed on his big-game hunt when, toward evening of the fifth day, Clate Cheever came jogging to the gathering-ground on a jaded bronco. Belle pointed him out, riding in from the west between Gove and Lanky.

"Al told me it was about time for Clate to show up," she said. "He'll put still more hop into the boys. He's the greatest hustler and foreman this side of Cheyenne."

"Yet I understood from Mr. Rowan that the Box L has been losing ground," Ken put out a feeler.

"Range luck," replied Belle. "Spring blizzards are freakish. They've twice hit the Box L hard. There was also that big rustler raid last year against the Box L, when—when my father was killed. I expect Clate has told you all about it."

"No. He didn't seem willing to go into particulars."

"Can you wonder? It would make anyone feel cheap to be fooled that way. Some of the gang got on the Box L payroll. They were able to keep the rustling under cover for months—all the time between two round-ups. It made a big hole in the herd. When at last Cheever discovered what was going on, he and my father and Al trailed down the gang in the mountains north of the Bar Y range.

Wiped them out. But—but first they killed Dad!"

The girl's eyes had been as clear as the blue sky overhead until misted over by the tears she was too brave to let flow. She was telling what she believed to be the truth. Ken drew an inward sigh of relief. His doubt of her had been too slight to be taken seriously. Yet getting rid of it added glamour to the brilliant sunshine.

"Belle!" he said. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But the angels will soon be here to interrupt our tête-à-tête. I must know. Is it permissible for a tenderfoot to tell a cattle queen that he loves her?"

Her flush encouraged him. Not so the quizzical smile that followed it, or her bantering reply: "Why not? A cat may look at a king."

"Good enough, your majesty. As the cowboys say, I've sat into the game. Unless I get too crooked a deal, I hope to gather in a royal flush that will include the queen of hearts."

This time the blue eyes flashed. "Clate and Al are both square shooters. I told you how it was my fault, not Al's, that he drank too much and acted that way towards you at Bullhide."

"Nothing he had said to me since I became your guest here has sounded like an apology," Ken thrust back. "However, I'm asking nothing from him. All I want is a fair field and no favor—and may the best man win."

"Oh, well, that's more like," she said.

THE smile that went with this told him he was in the running. More than that, he sensed that he had already run past Cheever and was beginning to overhaul Gove.

All too soon, the trio of riders broke in upon his duet with the girl. Gove waved a gay salute.

"Whoopee, Belle! Here's Clate. Wont take long now to poke an iron on the last calf hereabouts!"

Belle ignored Lanky, who had dropped behind his companions. She smiled a welcome to Cheever. "Howdy, Clate. You're a day behind your usual schedule."

"Howdy, ma'am," replied the big foreman, his cold eyes momentarily aglow. They turned to fix a frosty stare upon Ken. "Wasted time hunting this big-game hunter. 'Fraid he'd be shooting

more steers for lack of ven'son. Sorry to hear he's been mooching on your outfit."

"No need for you to worry, Clate. He's amusing company."

"Yes," confirmed Ken. "Your crew here are sticklers for etiquette. They refused to receive me without an introduction. But I'll overlook your negligence in the matter. Miss Forsythe and I have entertained each other."

Gove had to put in a gibe: "That's leastways half true. You gave the lady plenty to laugh at."

"She'll tell you I'm getting the savvy, as you say," Ken defended himself. "I learned a lot with Cheever, and I've learned more here. I noticed how few calves Mr. Rowan has at this gathering-ground. Miss Forsythe just told me it is due to blizzards and rustlers. Cheever did not mention the cow-thieves."

Ken saw Gove shoot a sidelong glance at his companion. Behind them, big-nosed Lanky narrowed his already squinting gaze. But Cheever spoke in a tone of cool indifference.

"Even a dude tenderfoot can know too much. It's a matter of general knowledge how cow-men take care of rustlers. That's not saying we gab about our personal business to outsiders."

"Not by a long sight," approved Gove. "Mebbe, though, the dude can do more for his friend Rowan's outfit than butcher his slow-elk. How 'bout it, tenderfoot? You been *pasearing* all over the range. Haven't cut sign of any rustlers your ownself other than your Man-Friday Jake, have you?"

"Jake? I've told you the unfortunate farmer is honest. But I did think I had found a pair of bad-men. Coming back from Miss Forsythe's ranch, on my first hunt, I must have taken the wrong way. I recall now that she told me to keep to the right. Only, you know how it is when one is thinking of the loveliest lady he has ever met."

This brought a smile and blush to Belle's face, and a flush without any smile to her foreman's. The Texan hesitated, all the more angered because unable to think of a reply that would offset the effect of the "dude's" compliment.

Cheever was not so easily ruffled or diverted. He asked in a flat tone: "So you shied up into the hills?"

"How did you guess it?" exclaimed Ken. "Up there among the pine trees I

should have found deer and moose and grizzly bears, should I not? Unfortunately, other hunters began shooting at me. I thought best to go down on the open prairie where they could see I was a man. Do you think they could have mistaken me for elk?"

Lanky cut in from the rear, ahead of his fellow cow-men: "Not a *slow* elk, I reckon, if you ask me."

Though the big-nosed speaker did not crack a smile, Belle chuckled and Gove grinned. Cheever stared over his shoulder at the low, pine-dark mountains, and spoke with stony grimness.

"Reckon you best keep to open ground hereafter, Mr. Kenneth. Hunters in the trees are mighty apt to be quick on the trigger, and hunters round these parts generally kill what they shoot at."

The mirth left Belle's face. "Nonsense, Clate! Trees or not, none of our riders is fool enough to mistake a horseman for an elk or any other kind of game. After all, that attack on Mr. Kenneth was no joke."

"Allow me to differ, ma'am," put in Lanky. "Couple of elk-tooth hunters dropped in on the Bar Y headquarters that same day. They was full of booze an' devilment. Kept laughing an' nudging one 'nother like they had a plumb funny joke on somebody. I'm betting 'twas the hazing of this here dude he's tol' about."

"He's lucky," said Cheever. "If they'd been ornery drunk, the buzzards would have picked his bones. Not my fault he keeps chasing off alone. Yet Mr. Rowan is apt to hold me accountable. Just you witness for me now, I'm warning him to keep out here on the plains."

"Thank you, Cheever," replied Ken. "If it is a question of my rovings getting you into trouble, I'll give serious thought to your advice."

HE had opportunity to do this thinking at once, for Belle rode off with the three cow-men to talk over a steer deal suggested by Gove. Left alone, Ken mulled over Lanky's explanation of the shooting. It sounded very plausible. Belle had accepted it at its face value. How could any tenderfoot do otherwise? But Ken was not the greenhorn he had made himself out to be, and he had reasons for doubt of which Belle knew nothing.

Two days more should see the finish of the round-up. He would then take Jake

for a hunt. They could start out eastward, circle at night, and strike into the mountains without being seen. Big-game hunting? Yes. Trailing grizzlies is child's play compared with going after a bunch of bad-men.

But Belle had not been mistaken when she foretold that Cheever would pep up the round-up. The circle riders completed their combing of the range the next day. More than this, late in the afternoon three of the Box L crew brought in a small bunch of cattle that at once fixed the attention of every rider who came near them.

Ken, loitering with Belle beyond the dust of the milling herd, saw Gove sign to Cheever and Lanky. Belle also noticed the signal. She led the way around to where the foremen and several cutters were grouped beside the Box L riders.

None of the men appeared to heed the approach of the lady boss and her companion. All were peering gravely at three calves beside three cows, on the near side of the bunch of cattle.

One of the Box L riders broke the tense hush. "Found 'em at a seep hole over crost yan ridge—cached in the willers."

"Might 'a' guessed it," said Gove. "Saw him heading off that way yeste'day."

Ken looked past him at the bunch of cattle, and understood. The three cows bore the Box L brand—but their calves showed the fresh raw burn of the nester Jake's Diamond J iron.

CHAPTER X

LANKY'S voice, hoarse and low-pitched, broke the renewed silence like the croak of a buzzard: "He's coming in now—south there—him an' one of your boys, Alamo."

Gove reached for his rope. "Come on, Clate. Le's go get him. Lanky, you guy up a wagon-tongue. It's too far to a sizable tree."

Ken was thinking hard and fast. What should he do? To show his hand at this stage of the game would be ruinous. In fact, he had no hand to show, at least nothing more than a four-flush. Suspicion and half proofs would count no more than a two-spot against those three Diamond J brands. They would, in fact, play the deuce in a show-down—spoil his whole -game.

The calf-branding was, of course, a frame-up. Jake had been desperate enough to beef a steer for his hungry family. Given half a chance, he would have burned or buried the hide with its tell-tale brand. But the man was not an utter fool. Only an idiot would have stuck his iron on another outfit's calves during round-up.

On the other hand, here were the three Box L calves with the damning proof of the Diamond J on their flanks. Gove and Cheever and probably Lanky were determined to get rid of the nester. This was the false evidence they had cooked up to excuse the cold-blooded murder.

The only choice he could see was either to let them lynch the luckless victim, or call the crooked dealers to a show-down with his pair of sixes. The latter move would, of course, be equivalent to suicide. He might get two of the trio, possibly all three. But he had sized-up the Box L crew as gun-fighters, if not outright bad-men. Still, how could he stand by and let them lynch the unsuspecting nester? The man himself did not amount to much, but there were his wife and children to be considered.

CHEEVER was turning his horse to follow Gove. Ken put his right hand to his chest and reached with the left for the hilt of his left-side-holstered gun.

Not a moment too soon Belle unconsciously staved off the fireworks with a quiet remark: "Go slow with your rope, Al. And you, Lanky, leave the wagon-tongues stay down a bit. The nester is going to have his chance to talk."

"Aw, what's the use of wasting time, Belle?" remonstrated Gove. "They always have a whole pack of lies ready."

"No matter. Just fetch him here. We'll watch how he acts when he sees the calves."

"That goes, Alamo," said Cheever. "It's my say-so, not yours. They're Box L cows, Miss Belle can have what she wants. Anyhow, I always believe in doing these things regular. Sign your boy to head this way. The nester'll likely come along too."

"I'll go and fetch him," offered Ken.

The horse he had picked for Jake was a good one. Given warning, the nester might be able to sprint clear of bullets and outride pursuit. But Cheever nipped the move in the bud. He swung his horse broadside in front of the starting roan.

"You'll stay here," he ordered.



Gove plucked the man's old revolver from its holster. Up went Jake's hands. "Fore God, I didn't!—I aint no rustler!"

"This is insolence," rejoined Ken. "I am Mr. Rowan's guest, not one of your hired men."

Cheever met the reproof with a cold smile. "Glad you reminded me, Mr. Kenneth. You don't belong. No more is it proper business for ladies. Miss Belle, you better jog off with him, t'other way."

"I'll stay right here," replied Belle. "You will too, Mr. Kenneth."

Ken bowed. "Very well, since *you* ask it, Miss Forsythe."

The Double Bar circle rider with Jake had responded to the signal of his foreman's upraised hand. As predicted by Cheever, the nester kept with him, drawn no doubt by curiosity over the crowd of idle punchers. Of all times, this was when every cutter should have been hardest at work, roping and branding the calves.

Neither Belle nor any of the men gave the nester more than a casual glance as he rode up with his companion. Even Ken kept his eyes turned away, for Cheever was watching him with a bleak stare that might have been due to suspicion.

Though no one looked at the nester, horses were reined aside to make way for him as he came to the edge of the crowd. At that he must have sensed the hostility in the general silence and averted looks.

"Huh, what?" he mumbled. "What's doing, fellers?" His shifting gaze fixed upon the girl and his one friend in the crowd. "Oh, you're here, Miss Belle—an'

Mr. Ken. Say, boss, has somebody been throwed hard?"

"It's them calves of yourn," cut in Cheever.

He pointed. Jake looked. Down went his jaw. His eyes popped wide. "Gosh all hemlock! Who went an' done that?"

G OVE reached over and plucked the dazed man's old cap-and-ball revolver from its shabby holster. Up went Jake's hands. His eyes rolled wildly around at the silently staring cow-men and punchers. His gaze again fixed upon the girl.

"Miss—Miss Belle, I didn't—'fore God, I didn't! I aint no rustler! I—God A'mighty, my woman an' children! What'll they do?"

"You ought to thought of 'em sooner," Cheever cut in ahead of Belle.

"Oh, I say, Cheever, wont you show me his running-iron," appealed Ken. "I remember you told me that rustlers use a straight iron rod for their brandings. You said they hid it under a saddle flap or in the rifle scabbard."

The momentary blank look of the three cow-men and the three Box L punchers who had brought in the misbranded calves did not escape Ken. Whether or not Belle caught the look, she perceived the point he had raised.

"Yes, let's see his running-iron," she in-

vited. "Show it to me, and I'll consider riding off out of the way."

Gove and Lanky made pretense of looking in the few places where a running-iron could be concealed by a rider. Ken watched close to make sure they did not plant a wire or rod on the intended victim's saddle. They may have feared that Belle also was watching, for neither attempted to turn the trick.

Cheever sought to discount their failure to find anything: "No use looking, boys. An old hand at rustling like him would sure be too slick not to hide out his iron."

"What's the difference, anyhow?" replied Gove. "We got him cinched with what he done. It don't amount to shucks what he done it with. Just you take a *pasear*, Belle, an' leave us give this caught rustler what's coming to him."

"No," refused Belle. "That iron—and his family. Anyhow, Dad used to say it was always best to wait overnight—sleep on it. Suppose something turned up to show that this nester was the wrong man? The joke would be on you."

"We'll chance it," said Gove. "We got a dead open-an'-shut case on this jay."

Cheever was less hot-headed and probably had a better knowledge of women.

"That'll do from you, Alamo," he replied. "You heard me tell this is my shindy, not yours. Whatever Miss Belle wants goes, I told you. The yap will keep till morning."

Ken saw a chance to renew the general impression of his tenderfootedness. He spoke out with enthusiastic clearness, above the ominous hush that had again fallen upon the crowd:

"I say, Miss Forsythe, to think of my being here to witness the capture of a real Wild West bad-man! And the prospect of seeing him executed for his cow-stealing, according to your cattle law—what romance, what adventure!"

BELLE turned slowly to face him, her blue eyes almost black with horror.

"Romance?" she murmured. "Think of his wife—and the children!"

Ken permitted himself to be properly dashed.

"I beg pardon! Of course—his family. They are not to blame. I will start a fund for them with a hundred dollars. No doubt you and these cowboys will all be pleased to—uh—chip in. But the criminal himself—as Cheever said, he should

have thought first of his family. Why, I never suspected he was such a desperado. And I hired him! Any time we were alone out shooting, he could have murdered and robbed me!"

"Not at all," differed Belle. "He hasn't the makings of a regular bad-man. He's only a poor fool who's lost most of his cows and has tried to build his herd up again the wrong way."

"That may explain but does not excuse cow- and calf-stealing," argued Ken with puritanical primness. "You are a lady. The tenderness of your heart does you credit. But it is the painful duty of us men to see that lawbreakers are punished."

Gove gave hearty approval, not of the "dude," but of the "dude's" statement. "You done said a mouthful, tenderfoot. When'll it be, Clate—daybreak or sunup? Lanky an' I want to be there so's to make it a joint action of all the outfits represented."

"No," said Belle. "The share of the Double Bar in the affair will be to take charge of the man for tonight. After that we cut loose from all responsibility."

Cheever forestalled Gove. "That's right, Alamo. As the Double Bar has a lady along, it's right and proper for her whole outfit to shy clear. That also bars you keeping guard on the prisoner."

Belle spurred her bronco in between Jake's and Lanky's horses. "I said that the Double Bar would take him for tonight. His bed-roll is still at our camp. Bring him along, Al."

Ken saw the three cow-men and three Box L punchers look inquiringly at each other. But even Cheever made no protest when Belle caught the nester's bridle-reins and rode off with the prisoner. Gove followed, calling out a sharp order for his men to hustle back to their calf-branding.

Cheever gave the same order to the Box L punchers. That left Ken alone with the big foreman and Lanky. He hastened to make a showing of morbid curiosity.

"Will you use a wagon-tongue, Cheever, as Gove suggested? Why not try that jerk-hanging you told me about—no tree or scaffold, only a horse snapping the rope? No doubt you'll execute him at dawn, so Miss Forsythe will not be shocked."

"Same's you," said Cheever. "Your bed-roll, like his, 'll stay at the Double Bar camp. You'll stick there tonight, and

you'll do well not to roll out 'fore sunup. I've told you before, it aint healthy for even a tenderfoot to know too much."

"Indeed? There's the saying that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. On the other hand—"

"Just what I'm trying to learn you," broke in Cheever. "What's more, too much knowledge is a heap more dangerous than a little. Take my advice and lay abed. What you don't see wont hurt you. Now, Lanky, about that deal for yearlings I was figgering on buying from your outfit—"

Ken watched the pair ride off together. They talked with their heads rather too close for men discussing a cattle deal.

When Lanky glanced back, Ken had started to lope his roan away from the camp. He hung around the herd and did not go into the Double Bar camp until Belle's woman cook beat the supper call on her dishpan.

Jake lay near the cook-fire. He had not been hog-tied. His ankles were lashed together separately from his wrists, which were cross-tied in front of him. This gave him enough hand-play to feed himself.

Ken filled his own plate and sat down on his heels between Belle and Gove, with his back to the prisoner. He complained that he now would have to hunt without a guide, as Cheever had not let him have a man. Gove hastened to tell his lady boss that their outfit was no more able to spare a rider from the round-up than was Cheever.

Before Belle could reply, Ken accepted the refusal in a tone of polite resignation: "Very well, since you infer it would be harmful to Miss Forsythe's interests. But may I be permitted to buy a stock of provisions from your supplies? Your food is more tasty than Cheever's."

"Stock up your saddlebags—no pay," answered Belle in a sharp tone.

Her roweling stung Ken to the quick. But he divined that it was intended to scratch him for his seemingly callous treatment of the luckless nester. She had rightly expected him to make at least a show of standing by his man.

None the less, he had to play his part, even though it cost him all that he had won of the girl's favor. He put down his half-cleared plate and went to fetch his saddlebags. As the cook was busy with her pots, he took from the chuck-box the supplies best suited for his purpose.

His offer of a bank-note to the woman brought another sharp reproof from Belle. With a show of offended dignity, he took the loaded saddlebags back to his bed place, and rolled up in his blankets.

THE twilight was already fading into dusk. Belle went to her tent with the buxom cook. Nightfall found all the punchers in camp asleep, except the man chosen by Belle to guard the prisoner. Gove sat up with the guard for over an hour; then, with a warning for the man to keep close watch, he also rolled in for the night.

Ken at once changed his plans. With two men on guard, the only chance would have been to rush them and make off along with Jake. But, given a lucky break, a single guard might be crept up on and stunned without rousing the camp. Jake might be helped to make his getaway without anyone knowing who had cut him loose.

A new note in the chorus of snores soon told that Gove was asleep. Ken started to slide out from under his blankets. He stopped short at the sound of quick light footsteps. They came from the direction of the tent. The man on guard slued half around and jerked his revolver from its holster.

Out of the dimness of the starlight beyond the fire glow came a cool, low-spoken command: "Put it back, Kelly."

"Uh—sure—yessum. Didn't see 'twas you, Miss Belle."

As the puncher hastily sheathed his six-shooter, his lady boss appeared in the circle of firelight. She spoke again, in the same quiet tone: "You had that fall yesterday, Kelly. I don't feel like sleeping. Roll in. I'll go on watch."

"But—but, Miss Belle, you got no need. I'm all hunkydory. 'Sides, Alamo ordered me to stand guard till midnight."

"You have my order. I saw you limp at suppertime. Roll in."

When an outfit owner spoke in that tone, cow-punchers obeyed, regardless of foremen. Kelly went to his blankets. He had hardly more than rolled up when the girl bent low over the prisoner. Ken peered above his saddle at the firelit pair. — He saw Jake twist up on his elbow, startled. The girl's hand clapped over his bearded lips. She bent still lower. Jake stretched out flat again. Belle crouched beside him. For all that Ken could see,

she might have been praying over the man condemned to death.

After a few moments Jake sat up. Then he lifted his hands and began to rub his wrists. Ken stared, no less in delight than astonishment. The nester's hands were free. Belle had unlashd his bonds.

She was beginning to untie the nester's ankles. No doubt now of her purpose. It was time for another helper to get into action. Ken took out all the bacon, cornmeal and coffee he had packed in his saddlebags, also a small sack of salt.

With the stealth of a hunted animal, Jake crept away from the fire, past the sleeping foreman and punchers. Still more noiselessly, Ken stole off to one side. At a safe distance from the sleepers he closed in on the fugitive. He was near enough to whisper a cautioning word before Jake knew anyone was trailing him.

As the nester jerked to a rigid halt, Ken pressed close to shove the supplies into his hand and whisper in his ear.

"Got these ready for you. You'll need the salt for your venison, if you have to lie out long. Wait here till I snare your horse."

"He aint in the corral, Mister," mumbled Jake. "Miss Belle says I'll find him saddled, up back her tent. She give me a roll of bills, an' says I'm to skip the country with the wife an' kids."

"Leave your family to me. I'll take care of them," promised Ken. "Don't forget what I hired you for."

"Yeh, I— But this here—it's a new deal. They'll string me up, sure's shooting, soon's they catch me ag'in."

"Not if I know it. I was all ready to lay out your guard, only Miss Belle beat me to it, her way. Come on. You're no quitter. Skip out, and you lose all. Side me, you stand to win four hundred head and keep your homestead, to boot."

"Well, I—" hesitated the nester, "well, I reckon I'll chance it."

The horse was picketed a few yards beyond the tent. Ken coiled in the rope, gave the fugitive a hearty hand-grip, and headed back into camp.

CHAPTER XI

THE lady boss of the Double Bar was seated before the dwindled fire, silently gazing at the embers. Ken crept past the sleepers, back to his bed.

Nothing would have pleased him more than to have gone on and told Belle how greatly he admired what she had done. There was more to it than her kindness in releasing the intended victim. Few girls would have had enough will-power and cleverness to have delayed the lynching and taken possession of the prisoner as she had. But Ken stopped beside his saddle and blankets. The time had not come for him to show his cards, even to Belle Forsythe. He slid in between his blankets to watch and wait.

Aside from adding a little fuel to the fire, the girl continued to sit motionless in the flickering red light. At last the night wrangler came to rouse the first relief of the night guards who were riding herd on the bedded cattle.

The grunting punchers rolled out of their blankets and groped off towards the stake-and-rope horse-corral. Only the night-hawk paused to peer at their lady boss and the vacant spot where the prisoner had lain bound. He let out a low mumble of wonderment.

Belle spoke without turning her head: "It's all right, boy. Get back to your hawses."

The wrangler melted away in the darkness. After a time the relieved herd riders came waddling from the corral. They must have noticed what the wrangler had seen. But they were older and more discreet. They rolled up in their blankets, without a word.

This made certain that Jake would have a long start in his flight. Ken took a last look at the silent girl beside the fire, and stretched out for the night.

He awakened to the poke of a pistol-muzzle in his ribs. No faintest gleam of dawn grayed the eastern sky. His blinking eyes could not make out the hat-shadowed faces down-bent above him in the dim starlight. But the angry mutter of Gove was unmistakable:

"You sneaky skunk! What you done with that thieving nester? Cough up, or I'll slice off your ears, you—"

"Choke that blatt, Alamo," broke in the lower, deeper-pitched voice of Cheever. "You'll wake her. If we prove it on him, you can turn your wolf loose. Only don't you go off at half cock."

Ken put startled bewilderment first, then wild alarm, into his outcry: "Who—what? Indians! Help—help!"

"Shut up," ordered Cheever, his power-



*A slim hand swung a lantern
up. "What are you doing?"
Belle gasped.*

ful hands tightening their grip on Ken's wrists. "Feel that? I can twist your arms off like twigs off a quaking asp. Now you talk. We're waiting to hear what time you cut that rustler loose and which way he headed."

From all around came the sounds of men rousing up from their blankets and drawing near to listen. Ken spoke in a lowered tone, but with the deliberate distinctness of offended dignity:

"So it's you, Cheever! This is an outrage! Take your hands off me. I did not release that miserable fellow. Ask Gove what *he* has done with him. He and one of his cowboys were guarding the prisoner when I went to bed."

"Rats!" jeered Gove. "You don't pull no wool over our eyes. We got Kelly right here, hog-tied. He wont talk. Only wait till we drag the pair of you over to the Box L camp. Reckon a redhot iron at your toes'll loosen up both your tongues! My guess is you bribed the *bobo* to roll in, so's you could turn loose your rustler pard. C'mon, Clate."

Ken rose to Cheever's heave on his wrists. Any attempt to struggle against that powerful grip would have meant broken bones, if not the off-twist of arms threatened by the big foreman. One might as well have tried to wrestle a grizzly bear.

One of the thick-fingered hands shifted from Ken's wrist to his throat. The voice of Cheever rumbled in his ear, cold and emotionless:

"No more squawking round here. Come along. Fetch your man, Alamo."

Ken's freed hand was already groping for the pearl handle of his outside gun. The holster held nothing except air. Cheever started to shove him along through the darkness. Ken slid his hand in under the thick arm that lay across the left side of his chest. If only he could reach that old trigger-lashed six-gun—

But Cheever must have felt the gently thrusting hand. His own hand let go of Ken's throat to clutch the upraised arm.

"Say, you! What you reaching inside your shirt for?"

"Shoulder holster," put in Gove. "Should ought to warned you, Clate. Fanner's gun. He bragged it's got nine notches on the hilt."

"So!" grunted Cheever.

He jerked Ken's hand out of the shirt-front and thrust in his own hand to grope for the gun. At the same moment a lantern glowed out from an opening blanket. A slim hand swung the lantern up shoulder high. Behind it Ken saw the white face and fear-widened eyes of Belle Forsythe.

"What—are you—doing?" she gasped.

The thought occurred to Ken that she was terrified lest her release of Jake might be discovered. He hastened to reply, ahead of Gove and Cheever: "It's all right, Miss Forsythe. Merely a practical joke on me. What your cowboys call hazing."

But the girl did not look at him. Her gaze was fixed upon a huddled form at

the feet of Gove. She took a sudden step nearer.

"Kelly! What's the matter, boy? Have they hurt you?"

The hog-tied puncher twisted sideways, but remained silent. He was gagged. Gove spoke, instead:

"Sho, Belle—no need you getting scairt. We aint touched him—yet. On'y tied the skunk. He wouldn't own up how this here dude sneak bribed him to cut loose our rustler."

THE color flooded back into Belle's white cheeks. Her eyes sparkled; her lips quirked with mirth.

"Joke's on you and Clate, Al! Turn the boy loose. I made him roll in, and took his place."

"You what? Took his place?" muttered Gove. "Say, you—you shouldn't ought to done that, Belle—take off the guard I set, then go off yourself an' leave this slick dude his chance to help our prisoner make his get-away!"

Cheever put in with deadly seriousness: "Reckon we'll string up the interfering cuss as a substitute. No matter if he is a tenderfoot. He'd no business horning in. Besides, he owned up to shooting a Box L steer."

The smile left Belle's lips.

"That's going a bit too far, Cheever. Better let go of Mr. Kenneth. He's the guest of your owner, and he's my guest till he leaves my camp."

"He's leaving it right away, Miss Belle," replied Cheever. "Nobody's going to pull a rustler out of my rope without getting his own neck in it."

The girl smiled mockingly. "All right. Only thing, you've got the wrong man. He didn't have any hand in it. I let the nester loose myself. Now go ahead and lynch me."

"You? You let him go?"

"Aw, you're dead easy, Clate," jeered Gove. "Can't you see she's stringing you?"

Belle pointed to the ring of silently on-looking punchers. "Am I? Ask the nighthawk and the boys who came in from riding night-herd. They saw me at the fire hours after I let the poor fool go."

"Huh-huh-but—say!" spluttered Gove. "Turn loose a measly thieving nester like him!"

"What's the harm? We'd have had his family on our hands. As it is, he'll scoop

them up on the run, and keep right on making tracks. Good riddance! Now, that's settled. Untie Kelly, and give the boys their day's orders. Daybreak's coming."

CHEEVER had slowly drawn his hand from inside Ken's shirt-front. It came away empty. But Ken held out his own bare palm.

"I will thank you for my pistol, Cheever—also for an apology."

The big man stared back at him, anything else than apologetic.

"Call on Gove. He's the one tried to cinch it on you. About your fancy gun, I dunno's it's safe for such a greenhorn tenderfoot to pack two."

"Why not?" Ken demanded. "Gove has told you the other one is the curio I once asked him about, but he did not stay to tell me. Some day, perhaps, I can show you what the man I got it from called fanning it. And yet, if you think I should put it away in one of my trunks for my curio-collecting friend Lord Swansford—How soon shall we be returning to Mr. Rowan's farm?"

"None too soon to suit me," Gove cut in.

"Day or two," answered Cheever. He shoved the missing revolver, barrel first, into Ken's hand. "There's your gilt-edged popper."

Belle was holding her lantern down close to Kelly. At a sign from Gove, one of the punchers had started to free the young fellow from the hogging-string and neckerchief gag. Ken was more interested in Cheever. He caught the slight jerk of the head with which the Box L foreman signaled Gove to follow him.

The group of punchers had already started to break up, each man intent upon rolling his blankets for the day. As Cheever and Gove passed out of the lantern light towards the horse corral, Ken headed for his own bed-place. But he paused only long enough to catch up his blankets, saddle and saddlebags.

By circling, he reached the far side of the corral in time to hear Gove muttering low-voiced orders over at the opposite side. The remuda had been wrangled in by the nighthawk. Three times Ken saw ropes whip up against the faint gray of the eastern horizon.

Soon three riders walked their horses around the corral. Ken crouched low be-

side a stake. The three rode past, their heads turned towards the dawn. Gove, in the lead, cursed the brightening glimmer. That was enough for Ken.

He stepped into the corral with his rope, and sidled around the horses till he made out the head of his roan up-reared against the silvering dawn-light. He whipped out his noose in a jerk throw. As he cinched on his saddle, he smiled to think how that cast of the rope would have widened the eyes of everyone on this range. No less so his skill and speed in saddling.

HE rode off quietly, keeping the remuda between him and the camp. Like Gove and his two men, he headed west. But once out of sight of camp, he swung around to the north.

About an hour after sunup he saw riders ahead. Two more had joined company with Gove and his pair. Ken surmised that Cheever had sent this quota to represent the Bar L. Five gunmen were two more than he had counted upon. Instead of racing to join the party, he sought to circle and cut in ahead of them.

The lay of the land was against him. When at last he topped the rise above Jake's ranch, he saw the five gunmen lined up behind their horses in front of the dugouts. They were shooting in through the open doorways of the squalid hovels.

Ken started to swing up his own rifle. But instead of firing at the attackers, he jammed the weapon into its boot and spurred the roan back over the ridge. He had caught sight of the woman and children crouched behind the old farm wagon. There were no horses in the corral.

If Jake had gone home, he had kept on going, astride his new circle horse. His family were in no danger from the shooting-up of the ranch. But any outsider venturesome enough to horn-in on the party could expect trouble. Gove, in particular, would be furious over this new misfire. Ken felt no craving to face such odds without urgent necessity.

While he was making a wide swing around to the far side of the creek, the racket of rifle-shots ceased and smoke began to roll up from the scene of the attack. From behind a sandy knoll he saw the riders jogging off southward. As soon as they disappeared, he galloped down into the valley.

Nearly all the rails of the little corral had been stacked in and over the fore part of the dugouts to make roaring fires. The hand-watered kitchen garden had been broken in upon and trampled under horse hoofs. Food, clothing, furniture—all were going up in smoke. The only thing left of the nester's outfit was the wagon.

Yet the woman and children came of a hardy breed. Loss and suffering and hardships were nothing new to them. The mere sight of Ken, a known friend, put an end to their grief and terror. The children stopped howling to grin at him. In answer to his first question, their mother "allowed" that he might find the wagon team upcreek.

Within the hour he was riding ahead of the wagon to pilot the dry-eyed woman on her drive southward.

CLOSE upon sundown they pulled into the Double Bar camp at the gathering-ground. The last calf had been branded, and the cut herds started drift-grazing, each towards its own range. Belle was checking up tally books with Gove, Cheever and Lanky.

The three cow-men looked none too well pleased at the live contents of the nester's wagon. Ken met the inquiring glance of Belle with a smile and the off-sweep of his big hat.

"Good evening, Miss Forsythe. You remember Mrs. Jake. I went to see if her husband had called by for her and the children, as you expected. He had not done so. Other callers, though, got there before me. This is all that is left of Jake's outfit. How about the fund I suggested?"

"No need. Reckon they're rightly saddled on me," replied Belle. She nodded to Gove. "This is what we get for your not giving him time to take them along."

"Well—" Gove sought to defend what he had done. "Leastways you an' Clate ought to thank me for wiping out his nest."

"Sure," agreed Cheever. "We want no thieving nesters on any of our range. Same time, we haven't strung him up—which ought to suit you, Miss Belle. All that's left is to see the woman and kids get through to Bullhide."

"Think so?" said Belle. "Now, my idea is that they are going to stay with me till our three outfits account for all

those three hundred head of Diamond J cattle, plus an average calf-crop."

"Lord! You gone plumb loco, Belle?" cried Gove. "A measly nester an' rustler, to boot!"

She looked past him at Cheever. "I don't mind you men running off nesters. It's our range. But just think what it would be like to have people say *we* rustled *his* herd."

Lanky grinned as if this struck him as a very funny joke. Cheever did not grin. He looked hard at Gove, and spoke with flat-toned finality: "That goes with me. The Box L will stand for a hundred head. Nobody's going to call me a rustler."

"Me too," chimed in Lanky, his grin still broader.

Belle smiled up at the draggled woman in the wagon. "Hear that? You'll get paid for all your herd. Until the matter is settled, you and the children are guests of my outfit. You look tired and hungry. Get down and rest. Supper will soon be ready."

"Thank you, miss. I dunno as your men have killed Jake. Jest the same, it's right kind of you."

CHAPTER XII

IN the morning, when the camps broke up, Ken neither stayed with the Double Bar outfit nor elected to go with Cheever. He donned the borrowed red-flannel shirt.

"Wish me luck, Miss Forsythe," he said. "I now know how to lure the elusive antelope within range of my rifle."

She smiled with a cordiality that set him aglow. "Best of luck to you, Mr. Kenneth! The way you brought in that poor woman and her chicks—well, I'll not say. Only, a saddle of your pronghorn venison would be welcome—if you care to fetch it."

"Will I?" Ken exulted. "Tell your cook to think up all her recipes for wild meat. I hope to bring in so much big game that even your man Gove will be fed up."

"Here's hoping with you!" replied Belle, regardless of her foreman's frown.

But Gove got in the last shot: "Sure, we're hoping you have the luck to meet-up with a whole herd of grizzlies, like I wished you t'other time."

As Ken jogged off eastward, he looked

over toward the site of the Box L camp. The outfit had pulled out before dawn. Only Cheever had lingered to pay his parting respects to the lady owner of the Double Bar. For all the big foreman's poker-face, Ken had seen in his eyes, when he looked at Belle, something that boded ill for any rival. If only a way could be found to goad the grizzly into action against the Texas wolf! To trail down a pack, a lone hunter has need of craft as well as nerve.

As first move in his present hunt, Ken swerved around a wide circle to the north and west. He rode as cautiously as his father would have ridden through Comanche country. Toward sundown his twisting, under-cover course brought him near the foot of the gulch down which he had ridden from the rock slide, after his flight from the mountain meadows. He left his roan to browse on the bushes in the coulee, and wormed up a side gully to the top of a hill. There, though no antelope were in sight, he set up his red-shirt flag on a stick.

UNTIL sundown and after Ken hid in a hollow beside the signal, peering out in all directions. The twilight had almost faded when, off to the west, he caught a pale reddish-yellow gleam that kept flickering out and on again.

He stood up and began flaring matches inside the crown of his big hat. The hollow of the hat was towards the distant glimmer. Almost at once the signal flickered out for the last time. Ken burned another match, then crouched down and drew his ornate six-shooter. No telling who might have seen his answering signals.

Dusk had already blackened the coulee and all hollows. Night crept up-slope to the hilltops. Out of the gloom came a cautious hail: "Hey, feller, how's cases?"

"Not mixed this deal," Ken replied.

Jake slunk up to him through the deepening night. "Huh! I—I'm durned glad you come at last, Mr. Ken. Got scairt you wasn't going to make it."

"Gave you time to scout around," replied Ken. "What luck?"

"Mighty poor. Them Bar Y calves in the mountain medder has all got Bar Y mas. On'y thing, up yan way they's a big hid seep. Not the one where they claimed I rustled them calves. This un's a walled basin."

"Yes?" encouraged Ken.

"Well, they's a big bunch of Box L cows round in that there basin, with a bigger bunch of calves."

"What! A hundred-per-cent calf-crop?"

"More'n that. Some them cows has twins. Funny thing, too, none the calves is branded."

Here was news—facts far more significant than the stupid nester had realized. Ken gripped the man's shoulder.

"Spill it! What outfit's riding herd on the bunch?"

"Ouch! Aint nobuddy!"

"Nobody?" questioned Ken. "Not even one rider?"

Jake rubbed his bruised shoulder. "Nossir—honest Injin! Leastways they wasn't then. On'y, 'long 'bout noon, I seen a outfit heading thataway."

"Whose?"

"Dunno. Must 'a' been eight to ten fellers piloting the chuck-wagon. You can't blame me for laying low an' not closing in on 'em. I aint hankering for the rope."

over ground where only an Indian trailer could have followed the beast's tracks.

Before daybreak Jake took his own horse and the roan to water. Ken cooked breakfast in a hole, over a smokeless fire of dry twigs. Sunup found them out of the foothills, slanting for the place where Jake had seen the moving outfit.

Easy enough to cut such a trail in daylight. Not so easy to follow it without risk, if the members of the outfit were what Ken rather expected. To be sure, the cows and calves at the hidden basin found by Jake had been beyond reasonable rounding-up distance from the last gathering-ground. For this reason Cheever might have sent a crew to brand the calves for the Box L at the basin. That would have been good foremanship. On the other hand, the party might be a gang of rustlers. Ken did not fancy being dry-gulched. Instead of leading Jake on along the trail, he struck off on a round-about course. If the outfit had not gone to the hidden seep, it would take only a few hours more to cut their trail again.



He began flaring matches, inside the crown of his big hat, toward the distant glimmer.

KEN had no fault to find. The nester had used his eyes, even if he did lack nerve and thinking ability.

He smiled at the tired nester.

"You've done well enough, Jake. We'll pick up their trail tomorrow."

The nester's camp was hidden in a side draw, well away from the spring in the gulch bed. Ken brought his roan from the coulee, and Jake guided them

Ken led the way until in sight of a twin butte. This Jake recognized as the landmark nearest to the walled basin in the hills. He then guided the approach along the under-cover route that he had followed when scouting for information. It wound around through the hills and up a ravine.

At its head the ravine flattened out behind a low ridge of sandstone. Warned

by Jake, Ken peered cautiously over the top ledge. He found himself gazing down from the top of a rim-rock cliff into a green-bottomed bowl amidst the hills. No stream flowed through the cliff-walled basin. Even this early in the season it was watered only by springs that trickled from crevices of the cliffs and across to the bullrush slough, or seep hole, in the middle of the bowl's bottom.

From the grazing cattle scattered over the lush meadows, Ken's glance shifted swiftly to the cleft in the hills across from him. Just below the cleft punchers were driving cows and calves from a small corral through a chute that led up into the cleft. Near by were fires, from which other men kept fetching branding-irons to the side of the chute.

"Gosh all hemlock!" muttered Jake, his head low beside Ken's. "Them waddies sure can stick it on calves P. D. Q."

"Clever branders," agreed Ken. "Question is, aren't they a bit too clever? Is that gorge passable?"

"Yeh, it's the on'y way in an' out. Cañon below has a jump-off too high for cows or broncs. Upside gulch spreads open. Can ride down its sides."

"And up it into the mountains?" suggested Ken.

"Cow trail thataway. Didn't feel like tackling it alone, Mr. Ken."

"Well, I'm here now, Jake. Next thing is to see if we're on a wild-goose chase. You said the cows are Box L's. Near as I can make out, my guess is those men are Cheever's crew of roughs. Joke will be on us if they're using the Box L iron."

"How 'bout that small rider shoving up another bunch of cows to the corral?" asked Jake. "His hat looks big as the sombrero of Lanky's Mex waddie."

"Stay with the horses," directed Ken.

HE took his rifle and began to work his way around the rim of the basin. Rather more than half the distance to the cleft he was able to see up the gap to where it widened. From the first easy saddle of the hills on the far side a wagon trail sloped down into the gulch.

Near the top of the saddle a waiting horse caught Ken's gaze. Close scrutiny showed the animal's rider lying just under the crest. Ken jumped behind a rock and leveled his rifle, certain that he must have been seen. But the man did not move. After a time Ken made

out that the lone guard was peering down the far side of the saddle at the trail by which his party had come to the seep basin.

The mere fact that the branders had posted a watcher on their back-trail clinched Ken's suspicions as to the character of the outfit. No less certainly, the guard's failure to keep a lookout in all directions showed that slight chance of interference with the gang's operations was expected.

Rocks and scrub growth offered good cover for a man afoot. Ken worked his way on around the rim of the basin and down a steep ravine that cut the side of the cleft a short distance above the head of the branding chute. Cows and calves were trotting up the trail in the cleft bottom.

Down around a turn in the cleft Ken could hear the shouts and curses and loud-mouthed raillery of the branders. But no man was anywhere in sight. From bush to bush Ken crept on down the ravine until within a few feet from the bottom. This was close enough to read a new brand with ease—only all the calves were headed uptrail with their mothers, and all were branded on the off side.

Ken's first thought was to stone a calf into turning around. But only one brand would be scant proof. He waited for a break in the upward-scuffling string of animals, and darted across the cleft bottom to a hole between two boulders.

Hardly had he backed into the narrow crevice when half a dozen cows came sprinting uptrail, sided by nine wildly jumping, loud-blatting calves. Every cow bore the Box L brand—and every calf was clearly marked with the raw red burn of the Bar Y iron!

Even as Ken's eyes took in the brands, his ears caught a sharp "*Yip-yip-yip!*" above the bawling and blatting. He ducked low to peer down the cleft. Another bunch of cows and calves was coming up on the run, followed by a tall horseman. The puncher was flicking the rumps of the drags with the end of his rope.

"*Yip-yip!*" he yelled. "G'lang, you little dogies!"

KEN had recognized the voice of the rider even before he made out his slim figure and big nose. He was not

at all surprised to see Lanky shoving up the animals that had been run through the branding-chute. No doubt they had tried to double back into the lush meadows of the basin. Ken backed into the crevice as far as possible and drew his fanner's pistol. If forced into a gunfight, the six-shooter would be far handier than his rifle at close quarters.

The jogging horse soon brought his rider opposite the boulders. Ken saw the cowman's unsuspicious but wary glance flick towards the hole between the big rocks. It peered a moment, then shifted across the cleft to where Ken's descent had left broken twigs and a scuff of dirt in the foot of the ravine.

The sudden jerk of Lanky on his bit tightened Ken's thumb upon the hammer of his six-gun. As luck would have it, the rearmost calf made a break for the ravine. Lanky snapped the bolter back into the trail with his rope end, and jogged on after the bunch. He probably figured that some other calf had tried to climb the ravine.

At any moment other members of the gang might follow Lanky, to help him ride herd on the cattle run through the chute. Ken waited only until the cowman disappeared around the first turn up the cleft, then dodged across the trail and took his time over making the stiff ascent of the ravine. At the top, instead of hurrying back to Jake, he twisted around between the crest ledges. When he gained the brink of the rim-rock cliffs the corral lay almost directly below him.

HE was now near enough to make out the five hard-working men with the branding-irons. All had been members of the Box L crew at the gathering ground. Two of the punchers in the corral appeared to Ken to be strangers. The third was now clearly recognizable as the small Mexican *vaquero* who had worked with Lanky in the round-up.

Fully satisfied that he now had a dead open and shut case, Ken crept back from the brink. He made his way around to where Jake waited with the horses.

"Uh—I was getting feared they'd cotched you, mister. Le's hit out of here," urged Jake.

"On a beeline for the Double Bar," replied Ken.

"Gosh, no! Gove's deader set on stringing me up than any of 'em."

"What of it? Miss Belle is our best bet. This gang seems to be all Box L and Bar Y men. None are Double Bar riders, so far as I can tell. Anyway, Miss Belle certainly is not in on the deal."

"Jest the same, Gove'll get me."

"All right, then. Hit out alone for wherever you please, if you think that'll be any safer."

Jake sidled around to his stirrup. "Hol' on, hol' on! Take me with you."

CHAPTER XIII

KEN thought best not to ride into the Double Bar headquarters late at night. He lay out with Jake, a mile or so down the creek. They rode up to the ranch shortly after sunrise. As he expected, the punchers had finished breakfast and were scattered out at various jobs. Gove was not in sight, nor was Belle. But Ken, in passing the corral, noticed the girl's favorite horse.

He rode straight to the house, waving friendly greetings to the punchers they passed. Jake spurred his horse close up alongside the roan, and stuck there even when he saw that the Double Bar men showed no signs of rushing him. He followed at Ken's heels into the mess-room.

Belle sat at the head of the cleared table, checking over a book of accounts. The sight of her work pleased Ken. It tended to confirm his belief that she was the real manager of her outfit.

He was still more pleased by the warmth of her welcoming smile. But before he could speak Jake sidled out from behind him. The glow left the girl's eyes as their gaze fixed upon the nester.

"What! You here? You fool loon! I told you to go get your family and keep running. You left them to be hazed."

"Yeh, ma'am, on'y—on'y y'see, Mr. Kenneth tol' me he'd care for 'em. He says he brought 'em to you. Kin—kin I see 'em now?"

"Not unless you go to Bullhide. Your wife was so set on getting off this range, I gave her a check for what your herd was worth when you came last year. Here, add your signature to hers on this bill-of-sale for your iron."

THE nester gaped stupidly, but took the pen and paper thrust out by Belle and scrawled his name under the name

of his wife. Ken gave voice to his own feelings:

"You're generous, Miss Belle—too generous! He was on the Box L range, not yours. I'll see that Mr. Rowan repays you."

"No, I get whatever's left of Jake's herd. Mr. Rowan might give him something for the relinquishment of his homestead. I'm thinking of that poor woman and the children, not of this miserable proved rustler who's been fool enough to come back and stick his neck in the noose again."

"Blame it on me, Miss Belle," interposed Ken. "I did not and do not believe Jake guilty. He stays on the range to help me prove him innocent."

"You?" The blue eyes sparkled with ironical amusement. "What does a tenderfoot know about rustling?"

"More than you think. Though you let Jake escape, I made him stand by his bargain to help me hunt."

All trace of amusement vanished from the girl's eyes. They flashed with scorn. "So that was it! You crossed my plan to get him safe away with his wife and children. You made him stay, knowing he'd be lynched if caught."

"Why not? Better for him to chance the rope, than to skip the country and be branded for life as a rustler."

"The silly loon put that brand on himself when he used his running-iron on those three Box L calves."

"No'm," contradicted Jake. "It's a dummed lie! —Scuse me, ma'am. Jest the same, I didn't iron them calves."

KEN answered the question in Belle's puzzled glance: "We've caught the real rustlers. In trying to get rid of the nester they couldn't haze off the range, they put their own necks into the noose."

"They? The real rustlers? You can't mean the gang that raided the Box L last year—the men who killed my father! But Al and Clate wiped them all out in that fight. You heard Al tell how he rushed in and got the leader who shot Dad. That's why I never can repay Al Gove!"

"Perhaps the other leaders did not jump in front of his death-dealing pistol," suggested Ken. "They may have escaped him. But whether or not any of that gang are members of this one, the rustling is no less clever."

"Clever? How about yourself? You've been siding a proved rustler. Is that how a tenderfoot has happened to nose out a rustler gang that none of my outfit nor the Box L had any inkling of?"

"I've been hunting all over the range. They haven't," explained Ken. "Besides, Cheever told me so many exciting tales about cattle thieves that I've been keen to catch some myself."

"You?" Belle laughed outright at the absurdity of a dude thinking to tackle a gang of bad-men. "You'd find you'd caught a bunch of Tartars! Even a single gunman would riddle you like a sieve before you could fumble that fancy popgun of yours out of its silver-trimmed bag."

"But I have no wish to be foolhardy, Miss Belle. I realize that any rustler—" Ken glanced at Jake and smiled—"any *real* rustler is apt to be a desperate killer. That is why I have come to ask you for a posse, instead of tackling the gang single-handed."

"Posse? So you're a sheriff! Why, I could have sworn you're a green tenderfoot. And yet, come to think—"

"Sheriff, Miss Belle? Of course I'm not!" Ken made haste to deny. "Just because I spoke of a posse— Isn't that the correct term for a vigilante party?"

Belle fixed him with a stare of keenest scrutiny. "We've been talking all at loose ends. Suppose you tell me more about your alleged rustler gang."

"With pleasure. You'll remember that those Box L punchers claimed they found the misbranded calves among the willows at a seep west of the gathering-ground."

"Certainly. I went to the seep myself the first day my men circle-rode from that gathering-ground. Routed out a bunch of steers from the willows."

"But you saw no calf-tracks."

"Well—no," Belle admitted, "at least not any fresh ones."

Ken clinched the point: "Nor did Jake as he *vamoosed* that way. Myself the same when I trailed after him. That proves his accusers lied. They themselves misbranded those calves to trap him."

"Likely enough. Some cowboys would as lief trick a nester into the noose as shoot an Indian. But what has it to do with your rustler gang?"

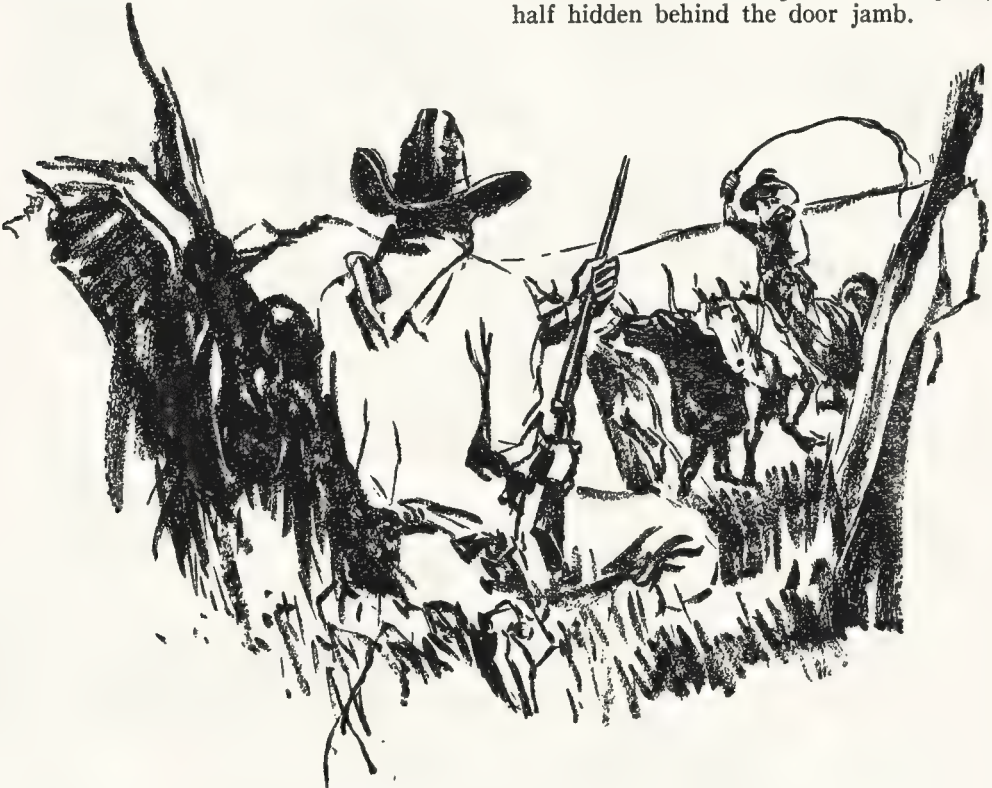
"Judge for yourself. When I overtook Jake we hunted along the foot-hills. In among them, below what must be the far end of the Bar Y range, we came upon

a hidden basin. You remember the shortage of Box L cows and calves?"

"Of course. What's the answer?"

"That basin was crowded with cows and an excess crop of calves," Ken replied.

She did not stop to saddle a horse for herself, but ran to borrow the bronco for a puncher who was heading upcreek. She rode away in the same direction. As the dismounted man cut past towards the bunkhouse, Ken asked him the whereabouts of Gove. The puncher saw Jake, half hidden behind the door jamb.



Cows and calves were coming up on the run, followed by a tall horseman, flicking the rumps of the drags. "Yip-yip!" he yelled. "G'lang, you little dogies!"

"The cows were Box L's, but the calves all came from the branding chute with the Bar Y."

BELLE straightened in her seat, her eyes flashing blue fire.

"So! I've just been comparing round-up tallies. The Double Bar's calf crop isn't so good as before Dad was killed. Now I see why! I never did quite take to that fellow Lanky."

"No wonder. He and— Wait! There's more about—"

But the lady boss of the Double Bar had snatched her hat off a staghorn rack and was darting through the doorway.

As Ken swung out after her she called back over her shoulder: "Wait here. I'm going for Al."

"No need you worrying 'bout Alamo, dude," he bantered. "On'y five mile to the hay medders. Miss Belle's bound to fetch him P. D. Q. He'll 'tend to your side-kick's necktie party *muy pronto*."

"Thank you most graciously," Ken replied in kind. He turned to Jake as the puncher waddled on towards the bunkhouse. "Tell the cook we'll not be staying for dinner. Ask her to put us up a cold snack. Keep indoors."

Leading Jake's horse, he rode down to greet the stable boss with a friendly smile.

"Howdy, pard. This pair of nags haven't had time to chew much grass. How about a good feed of oats for them?"

"Uh—reckon they're out of luck. Oats is sca'se hereabouts. You'll have to ask Alamo."

"Must I? Miss Forsythe will be with him when he comes back. You know, I never mentioned to her about those burrs in my saddle blanket. Wouldn't it be rather uncomfortable for Alamo if he should now happen to sit on them?—What'll it be this time, oats or burrs?"

THE stable-boss saw the point. He not only gave each horse a big feed of oats, but made no objection when Ken put as much more in a sack and tied it on behind his saddle. Horses travel much farther and faster on grain than on grass.

While the hungry animals munched their feed, Ken plied the surly boss with tenderfoot questions and kept sharp look-out upcreek. He was taking no unnecessary chances.

It had been a mistake to let Belle go for Gove alone. Would it not be a bigger mistake to wait for him here at the ranch where he would have several punchers within call? Were these waddies working for the lady boss of the Double Bar, or were they really working for the outfit's foreman? That was the question.

The horses at last found the bottom of their feed-boxes. Ken slipped on their bridles and led them from the stalls.

"*Mil gracias, amigo,*" he gave thanks. "I'll follow Miss Forsythe. Gove may be anxious to hear fully the news I've brought. *Adios.*"

He rode off, leaving the stable-boss agape at his knowledge of Spanish. His call at the kitchen door brought Jake hurrying out with a fat bag of chuck. They jogged off upcreek, followed by the curious stares of the punchers.

Beyond view from the ranch Ken quickened the pace to a lope. They had covered rather over a mile when he sighted a pair of riders cantering down the narrow little valley. The smaller rider flung up a hand in greeting. Ken flourished his hat as if in gay response.

"Huh—huh—look, Mr. Ken!" appealed Jake. "It's him—she's fetched him! 'Member you promised not to let him touch me."

"Did he that time you hauled in the steer?"

Not altogether reassured by the reminder, Jake tugged at his bridle and swung his horse in behind the roan. A little farther along a thick growth of alders screened the way ahead. Ken put

his hand inside his shirt front and then lowered it to the front of his belt.

As Ken drew near, with Jake keeping cautiously in line behind him, the foreman sang out blusteringly: "Hey, you nosey dude, what's this lie you've cooked up with that sneaky rustler you got trailing you?"

Ken smiled. He had noted how the Texan's right hand hovered over the butt of his front-holstered six-shooter. The fellow was all keyed up. Yet his stare was not so much angry as uneasy.

Belle backed up her foreman, in a tone half apologetic, half reproachful: "You've made Al hopping mad, Mr. Kenneth. He considers it an insult for a tenderfoot to pretend the discovery of a rustler gang, when he himself—"

"It's all a cooked-up lie," broke in Gove. "You can't string me, you measly tenderfoot! I aint a dead one. I was the first to catch onto that real gang's rustling 'gainst the Box L, an' I was the one to kill the desperado who murdered Dad Forsythe. Belle aint going to forget it, nor she aint going to allow I wouldn't know if another gang was rustling on our range."

"Of course," said Ken. "I quite agree with her."

Gove stared, uncertain how to take this hearty falling in with his assertion. Belle looked no less puzzled.

"Why—why, then, do you admit, Mr. Kenneth, it was all a made-up—joke—about your finding signs of a gang?"

"Not at all, Miss Belle. I am merely agreeing with Gove's statement that you'll admit he must know about this rustling."

The Texan's hand dropped upon the hilt of his gun. But Ken's free hand moved neither towards his breast nor towards his left-holstered gun. His thumb was hooked negligently in the front of his belt.

Given no excuse to throw his gun, Gove put his anger into words: "Hell! I didn't own up to no such thing, you lying—"

"Stop it, Al!" Belle checked his cursing.

He glared all the more threatening at Ken. "Blame him—the skunk! Go an' twist what I said plumb round!"

BELLE faced Ken with responsive resentment. "You had no right to do that. If your wonderful rustler discovery is the same kind of twisted thing, I don't care to hear any more about it."

Ken smiled at her, without for an instant turning his gaze away from Gove. "If you please, Miss Forsythe, I do not ask you to believe what I say. You'd of course refuse to listen even to Jake's evidence."

"That's no lie," sneered Gove.

"Of course. So all I ask is for the owner of the Double Bar and her foreman to come and see for themselves."

"You claim you can show us your gang of rustlers?"

"Not *my* gang, Mr. Gove. My guess is it belongs to Lanky—and his partners."

The cords of Gove's throat twitched. "Pardners—Lanky's pardners? What d'you *sabe* 'bout them? How d'you know he's got any pards?"

Ken had no wish for any shooting at this stage of the game. He side-stepped the question. "Don't you remember, when Miss Belle discharged Lanky, he spoke of being a part owner in the Bar Y?"

"That's so," confirmed Belle. "But he must have bought stock in the iron. It belongs to the Green River Cattle Growers Company—a small outfit somewhere south in Utah or Colorado. They shove their feeders up here for summer fattening."

"A very good way to account for an excess of calves and yearlings," said Ken. "Not so good, though, to explain why Lanky should work with the men of another outfit to stick the Bar Y on the calves of the Box L cows."

Again Gove's neck cords twitched, and again his hand crept down to the butt of his pistol. He muttered thickly: "Wha-ut—ou'fit?"

This was what Ken had been waiting for. He struck: "The Box L crew you were working with in the round-up!"

GOVE did not throw his gun, however.

He merely gripped the hilt and muttered another question: "Huh—them all? Nobody else?"

"No. But it's enough that—"

"Sure—sure it's 'nough!" shouted Gove. He turned to fling out his gun hand at Belle. "D'you get that, lady gall! Lord, aint it awful! The dude's gone an' found a mare's nest—a real honest-to-goodness mare's nest! Oh, my, my, my!"

But Belle looked as puzzled as Ken felt. "Mare's nest?" she questioned. "Yet that crew—I never liked them any more

than Lanky. I don't see why Clate always keeps the ugly bunch down at this end of the Box L range."

"Jest because they are such tough buckaroos," readily explained Gove. "They got the rest of the Box L boys sore at 'em. But they're all A-one riders, an' you know it."

"Still, that does not account for what Mr. Kenneth says they and Lanky—"

"Don't it, though!" Gove whacked his chap with the flat of his hand. "Lord A'mighty, Belle, aint you savvied the joke? Why, I could 'a' told him all 'bout this gosh-awful rustling discovery 'fore it happened. You saw me an' Lanky ride in with Clate the day he showed up at the gathering-ground."

"Yes?"

"Well, Clate had circle-rode round by that last hole jest a-purpose to tally them calves he'd had that south crew of his throw in there. Best feed anywheres along the foothills. It was too far, though, to drive 'em in to our last gathering-ground, an' no need."

"How so?"

Gove looked straight into the girl's blue eyes, and answered in a tone of serious frankness:

"I got to allow this nosey tenderfoot mebbe had a bit of excuse to think he saw something. Fact is, though, Clate knowed the Bar Y wanted more calves, so him an' Lanky dickered for the whole bunch in that hole. 'Twould 'a' been a fool waste of work to've branded the calves with the Box L, an' then, right off, stick the Bar Y on 'em."

"But Al, I never before heard of selling calves unbranded!"

"Why not? Clate gave the Bar Y a bill of sale. He had his own tally of the calves. To make sure the Box L didn't get the worst of the deal, he sent his crew to overlook the branding an' check the tally. 'Twould take a lot smarter guy than Lanky to put over any mavericking on Clate. The deal calls for him grazing the Box L cows on Bar Y range till the calves can be weaned."

Ken saw the amused yet half pitying look on Belle's face as she turned to smile at him. It told him he had lost his play. Common sense added that he should smile back and take his medicine. But he simply could not swallow Gove's sneer of gloating.

"I savvvv the game better than Miss

The Box L Mystery

Forsythe, Alamo," he said. "Why not tell her about your share in the—steal?"

Gove's eyes went red. His rage goaded him to action; his craftiness perceived an advantage. The "dude's" right hand hung down below his breast; his left hand was held up and out in overdone imitation of the cowboy grip on the reins. The lifted corner of the foreman's lip twitched.

"You lying skunk! I'll learn you to insult a gentleman. Shuck it!"

At the word, his gun leaped from its holster. But the shot only hit the sod alongside Ken's horse. A split second sooner Ken had twirled the fanner's gun from behind the front of his belt.

Belle cried out, and spurred her horse around to put herself between the men. But Ken's old "smoke-wagon" was already nosing into its armpit holster. Gove's gun had dropped to the ground as his right arm went limp.

CHAPTER XIV

THE moment the girl saw Ken put away his gun she turned in her saddle to look at Gove. His left arm was raised overhead. Her glance fixed upon the hole in the sleeve on his down-hung right arm. The cloth around the hole showed a fast-widening blotch of wet red.

She flared around at Ken, with all the fiery scorn of her loyal indignation. "For shame! You coward! Don't you shoot him again—I'll have you hung for murder!"

"Coward? Murder?" questioned Ken. "Didn't he call for it and draw first?"

"Yes, and you with a hidden gun! What else is that than treachery? And to go and egg him into it with your insults—him, the man picked by my father, the man who stood by my father in that dreadful fight with the rustlers!"

Ken saw that his blunder was even worse than had at first appeared. So far as Belle Forsythe was concerned, he had seated Gove all the more securely in the saddle and set himself afoot. That foolish gibe had given the foreman excuse to throw his gun.

The result had been far different from what the Texan had intended or expected. But he could not have asked for a more favorable outcome. After her foreman's plausible explanation of the calf-branding, Belle of course believed



Ken's taunt of stealing both false and malicious. This being so, Gove's resentment of the accusation had seemed entirely justified. The fact that he was the one shot, instead of his taunter, had very naturally softened her loyalty for him into tender concern and had deepened her gratitude to devotion.

Worse still for Ken, the look in those scornful blue eyes proved that he had lost absolutely all standing with her.

He lifted his big hat to her.

"Believe me or not, Miss Forsythe, I am very sorry this happened. Perhaps you will not condemn me so utterly when you stop to consider that I shot only to wing your pet."

"Rats!" sneered Gove. "You aimed to lay me out cold, on'y you're such a crooked shooter you come near making a clean miss."

"Oh, of course," bantered Ken. "That explains why I did not try another crack at you before Miss Forsythe offered herself as a shield for your protection. You may lower your arm now. I promise not to wing it also, unless you draw the hidden gun you carry."

Belle's indignant scorn flattened into contempt.



Belle cried out and spurred her horse around to put herself between the men. But Gove's gun dropped to the ground as his right arm went limp.

"You bragging fool tenderfoot! Think you can bluff us, do you, just because you happened to wing a real gun-fighter? Next time he'll be ready for your tricks. Now you make tracks! Get off my range with your rustler friend, and don't you come back on it."

"Very well, Miss Forsythe. I—"

"It's not well! Hit out this instant, else I'll pick up Al's gun and use it."

The girl was fairly beside herself with righteous wrath. As Ken swung the roan around, he half-hipped in his saddle to watch Gove. To cover this needful precaution, he made a show of indignation.

"Wait and see. Don't forget I am a guest at Mr. Rowan's farm. Cheever may have something to say—something different—about that queer calf-branding."

"Go ask him," urged Gove. "The quicker the better. He'll josh you clean off the range."

"And good riddance!" chimed in Belle.

Gove slumped in his saddle. He started to sway over sidewise. Belle sprang from her horse to ease the wounded man to the ground. She caught up his big revolver. "Go!" she cried.

Jake was already galloping into the alders. Ken raised his hat again to the angry lady of the Double Bar, and put the roan into a lope.

At the lower side of the alders he spurred his horse to top speed, and soon overhauled the runaway nester.

"Pull up," Ken ordered. "D'you want to jump into a trap, down at the ranch?"

JAKE yanked his horse to a halt. He gaped back at the screening growth of high bushes. "Gosh, Mister! You went an' done it, plugging him an' getting her riled!"

"We'll cut across from here, straight for the Box L," said Ken. "That will give us a long start if Gove sends men from the ranch to trail us down."

The assurance failed to calm Jake's fright. "Huh—huh! They'll wolf us plumb to the Box L. Cheever's bound to pecture you. But me—he'll string me up quicker'n Gove or Lanky."

Ken did not reply until he had led the way across the narrow creek valley and up aslant the nearest foothill. A backward look showed Gove still seated be-

side his horse. Belle was dipping her hat in the creek. She probably had bound up her foreman's arm, and was now getting water to relieve his faintness.

Had it been only a matter of the bullet-wound, Ken gladly would have changed places with the foreman. The loss of his chance to win Belle was made doubly bitter by her concern for the Texan.

However, there was no use crying over spilt milk. He could never forget Belle. His big blunder had cost him not only the girl, but the help she might have given if she had remained a friend. She could now be expected to back Gove to the limit. That meant the Texan would be certain to turn his wolf loose.

The first question was whether the crafty foreman would hurry a message direct to Cheever. Should he do so, there would be no doubt left as to his relations with the poker-faced foreman of the Box L. On the other hand, he might send trailers to dry-gulch his enemies, as Jake feared.

In any case, the nester could no longer be relied upon as a helper. At best he was a weak sister. He had now become too terrorized to be counted upon in a pinch. Besides, there were his wife and children to be considered.

Having at last decided what to do, Ken hastened to relieve the man's dread. "Keep a stiff upper lip, Jake. Because we've headed for the Box L does not necessarily mean you're going there."

"Yeh—but fooling round Lanky an' his rustling gang'll be worser still!"

"How'd you like to streak in to Bullhide and fetch me the sheriff?"

"Bullhide 'd be jim-dandy. On'y you aint going to get that ol' broke-down cowboy sheriff to buck ag'in' any these here outfits. He tol' me so, straight out, when I ast him to protect me from Cheever an' Gove."

Ken nodded. "I thought as much. They'd of course elect for sheriff a man they could count upon—same as to the judge and other county officials."

"Sure for sartain, Mr. Ken. Come to think, I'd be mighty apt to get lynched right in Bullhide."

"That settles it," said Ken. "I paid your wages to your wife, and Miss Forsythe bought your iron. You'll take your family to Cheyenne."

Jake grinned, vastly relieved. He

tailed along after Ken for a mile or more, chewing on the sweet cud of his coming release from danger. Then at last the remembrance of what Ken had done for him must have partly pulled his thoughts away from the safety of his own hide.

"Hey, Mr. Kenneth," he called. "You'll be going to Cheyenne too, wont you?"

"They'll think I am, if you work it right," replied Ken. "I'll tell you how when the time comes."

A GULCH brought them down out of the foothills. They cut the round-up road on which Belle had started Ken for the Box L, after his first visit to the Double Bar. The moment he now struck into the road he quickened the gait from a lope to a full gallop. The fast run soon brought them to where the trail to the Bar Y branched off. Ken led on along the road.

Beyond the gap through the ridge that marked the boundary between the Double Bar and Box L, the road crossed a big coulee. The great gully twisted out across the plains in the general direction of Bullhide. Ken had Jake come alongside him. They turned off the road down the coulee at a place where trackers could not fail to see the hoof-prints of the horses.

After a time Ken ordered Jake to fall in behind again. The coulee presently took a bend off eastwards from the direct route to Bullhide. Ken struck up a slope out of the coulee. A short ride brought them to a ridge where the underlying rock cropped out in flat ledges. Ken halted on the first ledge and motioned Jake to ride across to the sod beyond.

"Keep on," he ordered. "Hit in to Bullhide fast as you can make it."

"Uh—you going to the Box L?"

"Don't worry about me. Get your family safe to Cheyenne. Unless I fail to—" Ken tightened his jaw. "When I succeed with this big-game hunt," he went on, "I'll square you for the loss of your homestead. You've risked your neck for me. . . . No, don't stop. Hop along. Scratch him."

Jake's spurred horse clattered across the flat rock and galloped away over the short-grass sod. Ken dismounted and led the roan off at right angles along the line of ledges. Wherever one of the shod hoofs left a print in the dust between two ledges. Ken paused to blot out the sign.

THE low ridge ended at a small butte. Ken picketed the roan in a grassy hollow and climbed the butte, taking his rifle. From the top he could see for miles around. Jake was already a mere speck in the distance, steadily loping over the land swells to the southeast.

Cattle were grazing off to the south and northwest, and a band of antelope appeared off east. But Jake was the only rider in sight. Rather more than an hour passed before Ken's peering eyes saw what they were looking for.

Where his own and Jake's trail left the coulee, a bunch of horsemen suddenly came plunging up into view. One—two—another pair—one more man—five in all. Gove certainly was hot for revenge, sending so many trailers to track down one despised nester and a greenhorn dude.

The leading man must have been a good tracker. He followed the trail of the two horses across the hard dry sod at a gallop. Had he kept that up, Jake would have done well to make no stops all the way to town. But on the ledges at the ridge crossing, all five riders pulled their horses to a halt.

One of the men pointed in the direction taken by Jake. Great as was the distance, Ken distinctly saw the out-thrust arm through the crystal-clear air. He drew his rifle forward to make certain it was in perfect working condition and the magazine full.

When he looked again at the bunch of men, they were once more in motion. They had not continued to follow the clearly marked trail left by Jake. Yet they were not coming along the rock ledges. Four of the bunch had started to jog off at an angle, on a slant towards the Double Bar. The fifth man was headed towards the Box L.

Ken lay watching until certain all the trackers had given over the pursuit. Then, at last, he looked westward towards the pine-dark slopes of the mountains.

"A bit of luck again," he congratulated himself. "They think I kept on with Jake, and figured we had too long a start on them. Knew we'd be safe, once we hit the rails at Bullhide and hopped a train. Fifth man is going to tell Cheever about the tenderfoot blundering upon that calf-branding and his unfair shooting of dead-shot Alamo."

This outcome meant safety for Jake, and a chance to make another unsuspected

venture in the man-hunt. But after all, was it so very lucky?

As Ken made his way down the one sloping side of the butte, he at last found time to realize fully all that he had lost by his foolish giving way to temper under Gove's mockery.

Gove knew the "dude" believed the calf-branding to be a case of rustling. He now knew that the supposed tenderfoot could throw and fan a single-action "smoke-wagon" with expert skill. This knowledge was on the way to Cheever at a gallop. He, if not Gove, would check up by sending a man to Bullhide. After that would follow a careful combing of the range for the missing guest of the Box L, and the combing would not be done by rescue parties.

The need, therefore, was for action—quick and decisive action. The best defense is to strike. Of course there was still time to pull out of the game—turn tail and streak for the rails. Gove by himself would have been a joke. Though not a four-flusher, he lacked craftiness. But there was Lanky and all that bunch of roughs, and back of them the cold-eyed, poker-faced leader of the pack. Plenty excuse for any man to run.

Ken told himself he was a hair-brained fool to stick at the game. Yet what else could he do? He was not going to admit himself a quitter.

CHAPTER XV

HIDE and seek is no child's game when it is a matter of hiding to prevent a bullet from seeking one's hide. Ken rode with his rifle ready.

To get back into the foothills he had to cross the road. He returned to it by way of the coulee. This gave him the shelter of the coulee's banks, and also proof, at the road, that six men had been sent by Gove in pursuit of the fugitives.

Fresh hoof-prints in the road showed that the sixth rider had kept on northwards towards the Box L when the five turned off on the trail down the coulee. This made it doubly certain that Cheever would soon hear what the "nosey dude" had seen and done. All the more reason for quick action.

But the need to strike before Gove could get in touch with Cheever was hobbled by the no less vital need to keep

under cover. To tackle so large a gang would be utterly foolhardy and hopeless unless they could be taken by surprise.

Even at best, he might find them bunched. No man could hope to hold up so many gunmen singlehanded, much less to fight the whole gang together. The only chance was to gather them in one, two, or possibly three at a time. To win even the possibility of that chance, he must work his way through the foothills and up into the mountains unseen.

His first venture to the mountain-meadow pastures by the trail up the box cañon to the pass had ended in his being hazed by the hidden riflemen into the cleft and drop-off slide. If guards were regularly kept on watch at the pass, ready to drive even innocent tenderfeet into that death-trap chute, gunmen probably guarded every trail up to the Bar Y range. At least during the calf-branding there had been that watcher above the hidden basin, peering over the mountain saddle, down the back-trail of the rustlers.

If there were other easy passes up between the rim-rock cliffs, by all odds they also would be guarded. This was all the more probable if, as Ken felt certain, Gove had sent a messenger to Lanky.

Ken leaned forward in his saddle to pat the high withers of the roan. "Sorry, old boy, but I reckon it's the only hole in their corral. You'll have to turn cat."

Deciding upon his route, Ken now headed for the gulch through which he had reached the plains on his descent from the mountains. He watered the roan at the spring near which Jake had camped, but then pushed on up-gulch.

More than three hours of daylight were left when he reached the foot of the lower slide. But when he looked up that steep slope of loose scabble, he dismounted, unsaddled and picketed the roan out to graze. The beast would have need of all the feed and rest he could get.

Rifle in hand, Ken started up the slope afoot. The climb proved far different than had been the descent. For every three steps upward, he slid back at least one step, sometimes two.

A full half-hour of rapid scrambling at last brought him to the cross-over shelf-ledge. At its far end he risked his neck by working on the upper slide, close to the brink of the drop-off. Much shifting and shoving of the loose stuff finally bared a crevice in the bed of the trough. Into

this he managed to wedge the corner of a heavy boulder. The boulder, in turn, gave anchorage for other carefully placed rocks.

The result of two hours of hard work was a short barrier, or wall, that dammed the near side of the slide, just above the edge of the drop-off. It gave a firm unshifting platform to step down upon from the end of the shelf-ledge.

Ken mopped his sweat-drenched face with his neckerchief, shook the dirt out of his Eastern riding-boots, and stamped on the rock platform.

"There you are, roan hoss! You'll at least have a chance to toe the scratch." He smiled up towards the head of the slide.

"Even if a scared tenderfoot managed to get down here without breaking his own or his bronc's neck, who'd believe him plumb crazy enough to try back-trailing it?"

Well satisfied, he returned down the lower slide, to eat a cold supper. At nightfall he tied the roan up short to a pine and gave him half the feed of oats brought from the Double Bar. That would start him off in the morning strong and light and well rested, which was much better than to let him spend the night filling up with grass.

ROUSED by the chill of dawn, Ken rolled out and made ready for the climb. But he did not start until the dim gray light brightened enough for horse and man to be sure of their footing. At the best, there would be all too much risk of sprains and broken bones on the upper slide.

With light enough to see, the soft fine stuff of the first ascent was only a matter of plunging rushes upwards, with an occasional short downward slither to a stop when the roan had to halt for wind. Ken climbed ahead to help the willing animal with tugs on the picket-rope and encouraging calls.

They reached the cross-over ledge in almost as good time as Ken had made the climb by himself. But the real test of the roan's strength and surefootedness and courage was still to come. Ken gave him a good rest and rubbed down his legs. A sip of water in Ken's hat completed the freshening of the horse. He all but pranced on the narrow ledge.

Yet when led to the other end of the cross-over, the roan jerked back on his

rope. He may have remembered how near he had come to sliding over the step-cliff in the trough bed. At any rate, the sight of the fifty-foot drop to the jagged boulders below did not suit his fancy. He snorted and pulled back.

Ken did not try to force the frightened animal. He stroked the long head from between the startled eyes down to the quivering trumpet nostrils. The roan soon calmed under the quieting caress. He nuzzled his master's hand. Ken stepped down upon the rock-dam platform and asked the horse to follow.

This time the roan ventured to jump from the shelf-ledge. The built-up pile of rocks held firm under his weight. Ken at once started up the slide, lead-rope in hand. The horse followed him, scrambling bravely up the sharp pitch of the treacherously slithering and sharp-edged stones.

The struggle was on, a struggle no less dangerous than hard and painful. Stone edges bruised the legs of the plunging horse. Boulders too heavy to be moved by Ken's carefully balanced weight crashed down the slide under the thrust of the roan's spurning hoofs.

But the upward lunges of the sure-footed animal kept him ahead of the loosened rocks. Guided by Ken's pull on the lead-rope, he slanted up across the slide from side to side wherever the footing looked to be the least difficult.

By quick eyework, Ken located places where stops could be made. Otherwise the roan must have stumbled and fallen from overexertion. Owing to these rests, no less than to the roan's nimbleness and courage, they managed to climb the most dangerous part of the slide without serious mishap.

The dirt and small scabble above was similar to the other slide. It meant hard climbing but slight danger. Then came the solid rock climb to the top of the trough, and the steep descent of the opposite cleft.

Down among the pines on the west slope of the mountains, Ken at last stopped to look at the roan's legs. He found many bruises and small cuts, but no sign of sprains or torn tendons. He mounted and rode down aslant the mountain-side, keeping under the cover of the pines.

A rill in a ravine gave water to slake the roan's thirst and to bathe his cuts. While the animal rested, Ken climbed a

pinnacle of rocks. From its top he looked down across the expanse of mountain meadows. Beyond a cross-belt of aspens at the far end spread another open mountain park, less flat and green but much larger. Like the meadows, it was dotted with grazing cattle.

Above the shimmering tops of quaking aspens, near the middle of the belt, a vague, almost invisible blur grayed the blue of the cloudless early morning sky. After gazing at the small shifting misty patch a few moments, Ken searched the meadows for men. He could see only a single rider jogging up the slope to the trail pass.

Over beyond the aspens two more horsemen were riding off westward. All the rest of the gang might be bunched at the Bar Y headquarters, or they might be scattered around the far boundaries of the mountain range. The only way to find out was to go and look.

STRONG again after his rest, the roan made fast time along the lower mountain slope to the far end of the meadows. There, as Ken expected, the belt of aspens gave cover for him to venture out on the lower ground. It was crossed by several trails trampled through from pasture to pasture by drifting cattle. But none of their trails ran lengthwise of the tree belt.

Well out from the pines, Ken tied the roan in a dense thicket of alders. Rifle in hand, he then went on afoot, stepping softly and keeping as carefully under cover as if stalking a grizzly. He soon came to the creek that meandered down from the middle of the meadows. It was joined by a spring rill that flowed between the aspens across from Ken. He could have leaped the creek. But after listening for a while, he stepped noiselessly into the shallow stream and waded across.

With utmost care he wormed up among the willows on the far bank. No less cautiously he glided through the bushes along the bank of the rill. As he expected, the undergrowth suddenly ended on the edge of a clearing in the midst of the grove.

Aspen poles wired to the trunks of the bordering trees formed a corral. Beyond the corral were sheds and cabins built from the larger aspens felled in the clearing. Out of the stick-and-clay chimney of the smaller cabin rose the column of dove-gray wood smoke that Ken had seen spread out above the tree-tops.

Not a man or horse was in sight in the corral or anywhere around. Yet the smoke told plainly enough that some one was "to home" at this hidden Bar Y ranch. Ken skirted around the corral behind the screen of trees and bushes.

He came opposite the open door of the smaller cabin. Still no sign of anyone around the ranch. It looked as if Lanky and all his gang had gone off, leaving only the cook.

There was no chance to get nearer the cabin without breaking cover. Ken swung out into the clearing, with his rifle slung in a careless manner over his shoulder. But his no less careless-appearing steps pressed as noiselessly as a moccasined tread on the thick dust of the hoof-trampled ground.

His quiet advance soon brought him to the corner of the smaller cabin. As he sidled along the front to the door he put his left hand on the pearl-handled revolver. His first peering glance into the windowless cabin made out only a shadowed figure at the far side of the dim room. He stepped in over the log threshold, with a quietly spoken explanation:

"Good morning. I'm out hunting. Can I trouble you for a meal?"

The figure jerked about and uttered a startled gasp: "*Jesus mi volgal*"

THE thought of Lanky's Mexican *vaquero* made Ken flip his six-shooter from its holster. But on the instant he realized that the voice was a woman's. Almost as soon he made out the form of a baby in the woman's arms.

Instead of the *vaquero*, it looked as if he had come upon the man's Mexican wife. Naturally she would be the cook of the outfit. He shoved the gun back into its holster and swept off his big hat.

"*Dispensauer, señora! Buenos dias.*"

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" replied the woman, and she added in high-class Spanish, with the gracious hospitality of her race: "You are very welcome, señor. Be pleased to enter. The house and all else is yours."

Ken's eyes, already adjusted to the dim light of the cabin, were making out the details of the woman's features and her surroundings. Her face matched her voice; it was of the beautiful, high-bred Spanish type. Her cheap dress was worn with grace, and the single room of the cabin,

though rather disordered, looked cozily homelike with its rugs and drapes of colorful Navaho blankets.

In the far corner, above a small crib made of sticks and rawhide, a pair of candles lighted a little shrine. Instead of an image, the shrine held an artistically colored picture of the Madonna and Child.

KEN seated himself upon the edge of the low bunk to which the woman directed him with a graciousness no American hostess could have exceeded.

"The welcome of the señora is very grateful to a weary hunter," he replied in Spanish as flowery, if not as pure, as her own. "May I inquire whether I shall have the pleasure of meeting the señora's husband?"

"Ah, no, señor, I regret that cannot be," she answered, and the look of grief and pain in the black eyes told Ken that her regret was all too real, and he apologized for his careless remark.

"Your señor, then, is dead?" he added.

"*Poder de Dios*, no! My señor lives. Only he no longer comes often to see me. After he left me, down in Senora, our little son died, and since Pedro brought me here to my señor, he is angered that I have given him this girl baby."

"Pedro?" inquired Ken.

"My brother, who is *vaquero* for Señor L'Anque."

Ken thought he understood. "L'Anque" was of course her Spanish for "Lanky." Even Northern born cowboys were apt to roam down to the border and across into Old Mexico.

"So Lanky left you in Sonora," he remarked. "And now he stays away from here."

"The señor mistakes. Señor L'Anque is a kind and honorable friend. My husband is the one who left me and now seldom comes to his Soledad."


"Your husband, Doña Soledad?"

"I am Señora Gova y Gonzales."

The last name Ken knew would be the name of her father, the first the name of her husband. Her Spanish pronunciation gave the latter a puzzling twist. He repeated it after her, "Ga-vah—Ga-vah?"

"*Si, señor,*" she confirmed, and she added with pathetic pride, "My husband is the famous master of *vaqueros*, Señor Alfredo Alamo Gova!"

The concluding installment of this swift-moving story of adventure and romance will appear in the next, the January, issue.



*She ran to
the top of
the ladder
and disap-
peared down
it like a
squirrel.*

On Location

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

By
CLARENCE
HERBERT
NEW

*Those well-known characters, the
Grigsbys, encounter some new
problems in this story of engineer-
ing and motion-picture filming.*

IF you studied geography in earlier days, you may recall the Appalachian range—particularly, if you had to draw it on the blackboard after school, in chalk-mark centipedes headed northeast. It's a perfectly respectable, well-behaved collection of mountain ridges with deep valleys between—but it really isn't the sort of terrain which lends itself accommodatingly to railroads. They go up one side and down the other; little branch lines manage to wriggle through passes at two or three points, with apparent difficulty.

The only outlet which the M. N. & E. had for its through freight to eastern tide-water was over other lines with which it had a rate-agreement, but which it in no way controlled: a satisfactory enough arrangement as long as those other lines didn't become active competitors from the source—very much the other way if or when they did. A situation to which John

B. Gresham had given some thought when he finally obtained control of the system. In some of the more inaccessible valleys the mountaineers raise corn and peaches—mainly for home consumption, but exceptionally good corn and peaches none the less, as they discovered when a few small lots got as far as the seaports and fetched unheard-of prices.

Somebody had talked with John B. Gresham one day, over west of the mountains, when his private car stood on a siding for a few hours. Most everybody had heard that he now controlled the M. N. & E.—and that he was very approachable.

With merely corn and peaches on their minds, seeing nothing in the proposition beyond that, they managed an interview with John B. during another of his trips over the system, and just by food inspiration, had provided themselves with some

of the Government topographical sheets on that locality. Much to their surprise, the big man immediately became absorbed in these, questioning them from time to time as to exactly where they were located, how much of the valleys could be put under cultivation, how much had been cut over, what the average stand of timber was. He began figuring elevations—on an envelope. What he visualized wasn't mere carloads of peaches and corn, but a shortcut for his own system to eastern tide-water ports.

THE upshot of that interview was a rumor which spread through other railway systems east of the Mississippi that the M. N. & E. had about decided on a shortcut through the mountains—somewhere. Which was a matter of immediate concern to the B. K. & L., the most active competitor of Gresham's roads. As long as he only got through to eastern ports over other lines under temporary rate-agreements, they might compete with at least an even chance—frequently obtaining more tonnage than Gresham liked. But with his own shortcut, if it ever went through, they were out of it on any territory which the upper ramifications of his system tapped.

This brings us to the day when Gresham was killed by a speed-maniac crashing into his motor-car from a side road—and the immediate dropping of M. N. & E. shares upon the stock exchange. Upon the morning of the day when Gresham's will was admitted to probate, one of the amiable colossi of Wall Street—one Samuel K. Wentworth—telephoned so urgent a call to the president and leading director of a very large bank that, after some protest, they came up to his private office, where they were made comfortable with excellent cigars and refreshments.

"Moberly—I know that you and Fishbeck are busy men, so I'll make this as short as possible. Gresham's daughter Helen, and you two, were made executors of his will, I believe—and are offering it for probate today."

"Really, Wentworth! You know as well as we do that no provision of a will is divulged—talked about in any way—until it has been probated and duly published."

"We won't argue that point. John B. consulted with me when the will was being drawn up—told me who his execu-

tors were—and he had no time to make another or change this one. Undoubtedly you've gone through the list of securities—Helen would see that you did. She's only twenty-three, but two years in the movies have made her a pretty good business woman. Fred is merely a fool kid of nineteen—irresponsible, ought to have a guardian until he's thirty. Thad is more like Helen, but under Fred's influence a good deal. Well, Gresham owned forty thousand shares of M. N. & E., and there are twelve thousand more in the hands of friends who wouldn't have sold one of them unless he told 'em to—which gave him control of the system. There were other holdings, but these were the bulk of what he had. You've noticed, of course, what's been happening to those shares since his death—and it's not a circumstance to what's going to happen before the end of the week. The B. K. & L. crowd have only been waiting for the probate of that will, knowing that you executors couldn't sell the shares before. They were selling around 102 when that collision occurred—quoted at 75 this morning. By Friday afternoon they'll be down to 40 or less. That block were worth over four million when Gresham died—less than three millions now. By next week they'll be worth less than one million, on the market. Now—what action will you take?"

"We've given that point some pretty anxious consideration, Wentworth—though we knew nothing of a concerted attack upon the stock. It seems to us that, in the children's interests, we'd better get rid of those shares today, if we can—and save what there is to save!"

"Precisely what that crowd expect you to do—and throwing forty thousand shares on the market in one bunch will send the stock plunk to hell right now. They know that you're bankers, not railroad men—and obliged to safeguard the interests of the heirs as best you can. If you were railroad men, they'd know you'd sit tight, hold on to that stock and buy enough as it dropped to give you absolute control. Of course, Gresham's friends will be scared into selling theirs, now that he's not here to advise them. Well, I've been picking up little blocks of the stock through various brokers as fast as it was thrown on the market. With Gresham's forty thousand, I've enough to give us control right now. If you will

keep those certificates in his safe-deposit box and forget them, the stock will go to 120 inside of two weeks, and the heirs will have just that much better property. I know about what John B. meant to do with that system—and I'll go right ahead developing his plans. Can I depend upon you two? Will you sit tight—and not throw the property to the winds?"

"Why—you put us in a difficult position, Wentworth! We're not permitted to bargain with trust funds, you know."

"You're not permitted to speculate with or throw them away, either! Great cats! Can't you men see the point? We three are sitting pretty, right now—holding all the cards! Some of that gang are selling short—when I call for my certificates, they haven't got 'em to deliver, and you can bet your sweet disposition they'll pay whatever I ask for 'em!"

"Suppose something happens to *you*? Then there'd be another raid on the stock which might catch us at a lower price than we can get now!"

"I'll add a codicil to my will that my heirs are to vote that stock with Gresham's—provided you both elect the man I'll name as president to succeed me—a man who can handle the system as well as I and is absolutely straight. You can read that codicil and sign it as witnesses. Wont that satisfy you?"

"Well—we'll go into conference when we return to the bank—and let you know later. Personally, I'll say that your proposition looks fairly safe to me. But I think Fishbeck is doubtful—I'm quite sure that some of the heirs will be, also."

"All minors except Miss Helen. . . . All right, gentlemen! Do as you think best. The girl is making eight hundred a week and can take care of herself if you lose every cent of the estate. The boys need to have their noses on the grindstone five or ten years, anyhow. Nobody can lose much but you two. If you chuck away a five- or six-million-dollar estate, it'll put you out of the banking business—I think."

AS soon as the bankers had left his office, Wentworth rang for his secretary.

"Flora, get the Gresham house on the wire—quick! Ask for Miss Helen! If not in, ask where you can reach her by phone! Lively, now!"

As the cast were not working that day,

Helen Gresham readily agreed to come down at once—and reached Wentworth's office in half an hour. He ran over the situation, briefly but clearly, so that she saw every point and angle in it—promptly agreeing to his proposition for the stock. She said her young brothers were going down right after lunch to insist upon the two bankers disposing of the shares as quickly as they possibly could, in order to save something from the wreck—both youngsters expecting to bank large sums for spending-money at once, and planning to leave for Europe as soon as they could arrange it. She didn't know what she could do, alone, and was much relieved at this chance for advice from one of her father's trusted friends.

"Confidentially, Helen, I think Fishbeck stands to get some kind of a rake-off from that other crowd for selling your father's stock. I'm not fool enough to say that outside—because I can't prove it. What I'm looking for is this: those two birds will come to you tomorrow with the statement that the shares have been sold to save what they could on them, and check received. Then they'll spread out the certificates with all the other endorsements on them and ask you to sign. If we hadn't had this talk, you probably would—they'd use pretty serious threats until you did. But I'm going up with you to see Judge Tierney—now. He'll issue an injunction restraining those other two executors from making a single move without your full and willing consent. Then we'll drive right down to the bank and you can serve it on 'em before they've had time even to get started. Understand me, girl! You've known me ever since you were a baby—know what your father and I thought of each other—know something of my reputation. If you don't feel absolutely safe in having me take over the management of the M. N. & E.,—after consulting some of your father's other friends in whom you have confidence,—I'll sell you my shares cheap and you can put in anyone else you please."

She kissed him impulsively, by way of thanks.

"There's nobody else who'd have suited Dad half so well! He wanted to make you co-executor with me—but said there was sure to be a raid on all his securities when he passed out, and it would let you

in for too much trouble outside of your own affairs. Said he knew you'd protect his interests even to the extent of risking your own money in a fight on the Street."

"He intimidated something like that to me, and I told him he needn't consider it—but there was another angle which we both saw. I might be considered by your brothers and relatives as using the estate assets in stock speculations of my own—so I reckon it was really wiser to leave me out of it. H-m-m—the probating of the will authorizes Moberly and Fishbeck to open your dad's box in their own vaults—in the presence of a tax appraiser—inventory everything in it, and then make any disposition they think advisable. I rather wish it wasn't possible for 'em to do that. Moberly, far's I know, is strictly honest. But he's a conservative banker, accustomed to handling securities as investments—not in a speculative way. It will look to him as if the bottom were dropping out because the system is in bad condition—worth less than half its par. In those circumstances, it would be held fairly conservative judgment to close out the shares for any price he can get. Fishbeck, under strong temptation, I think would prove crooked—but I can't prove it. Seems unfortunate that they're able to put their hands on those securities just now!"

"But—they can't, Uncle Sam! At least, I don't see *how* they can!"

HE stared. "What's to prevent them?" "Why—all of the M. N. & E., with the bulk of the other securities, are in my own personal safe-deposit box."

"*W-h-a-t!* How come? If that's straight—glory be!"

"Father drew up that will about two weeks ago, as you know. Next morning, he told me about it—said that in all their dealings for years Moberly had been absolutely straight, and conservative. But it occurred to him that they might urge me into doing something of which you would disapprove and which might turn out very much against our interests. So he took a small traveling-bag down to the Crane National, cleaned out most of what he had in their vaults, and then met me at the other vault, where he handed the bag to me and waited in the main lobby while I went down and put its contents into my box. I was locked into one of the little rooms while I did so.

"Nobody in the vaults saw a sign of him or has the remotest idea what I have in that tin trunk. My lawyer says I don't have to tell anybody what's in it or even that I have such a thing. In our house there is a safe concealed in such a way that no burglar has yet discovered it, though the house has been entered four times, and Dad put into it that night every personal or private paper he could remember—packages of Mother's letters—things he'd kept for years in the safe at his office. He and I were the only ones who had the combination of the hidden one. I've wondered during the last few days whether he had some premonition that he might not live long?"

"Great suffering cats! That's the richest joke that Fishbeck ever has had played on him yet! If he is fool enough to attempt it, for graft of one sort or another, and persuade Moberly to sell that forty thousand shares, quick, before the price drops lower, and they accept checks for it—that puts 'em both in the position of selling all that stock short! They'll have to pay every cent the purchaser demands of them—it'll bust 'em so high they'll never come down! If it were Fishbeck alone, I'd hope he'd try it—but we don't want to ruin poor old Moberly. Let's get that injunction and serve it on 'em as soon's we can!"

"And Helen, don't you open your lips about anything you've got in your own safe-deposit box or any knowledge concerning the hidden safe at home. Hand over to Moberly any keys to your father's desks or office safes he insists upon having with the clear understanding, before your lawyer, that after he has inventoried everything in your presence, nothing is to be removed, and the keys returned to you both as chief executor and rightful owner. That will give him a chance to list every available asset which appears to exist. If your dad had boxes in other vaults, he can show his credentials and go through them also—in your presence. He won't know where he's at! Even if he bullies or frightens you into admitting you've got the securities—and I'm betting he can't,—it won't do him a particle of good. You, being chief executor by right of inheritance, have more legal right to retain possession of those securities until they are disposed of than he has. Meanwhile I know that block of M. N. & E. isn't going to get on the market—have got control of the system, now—and will sew it up tight within the next week."

IT occurred to Wentworth that Fishbeck would be vindictive enough over being checkmated to persuade the two boys that it would be very much against their interests if Wentworth were voted into control of the M. N. & E. system—and bring about a situation wherein two out of three heirs, and two out of three executors, would vote adversely in a stockholders' meeting, or rather compel the block of stock to be voted that way. It

and had himself elected to the presidency of the system with no serious opposition.

He now made a dinner appointment at the Engineers Club with John Grigsby, who happened to be in town for a couple of weeks looking after some of his many interests. When the engineer heard what was wanted of him, he leaned back wearily in his chair—and then laughed.

"Sam, if I didn't know how many irons you've got in the fire yourself,—you, with



"What interest have you in this matter? You call me a liar, do you?"

didn't seem legally possible, but it might be worked—so he had one of the ablest counsel in town arrange to have Helen Gresham appointed guardian for her two minor brothers until they were twenty-five. They might bring action when they were twenty-one to have the guardianship terminated then—but she wasn't obliged to defend such an action for two or three years and could, in the meantime, vote their shares of the estate as she thought best. Wentworth then bought in, through brokers supposed to have no connection with him, every share of M. N. & E. offered. When the "shorts" were forced to settle with him, ten days later, he cleaned up a million and a half for himself, sent the stock to 120—

your smug appearance of perfect health, —I'd say you were a bum friend, trying to ride a willing horse to death! Look here, man! We've just finished construction on the Tudor Campanile on Washington Heights and getting our coöperative apartment-owners into their suites. Of course the proposition has been organized to run itself, but in anything of that size there'll be considerable responsibility on my shoulders for some time yet. Then you fellows put me in charge of a fifty-million-dollar development company up in Maine. Ted Murchieson is a darned good executive, has married a nice girl up there, can handle anything laid out for him, has picked some A-1 men for assistants—but

the responsibility is on my shoulders just the same. And now you calmly suggest my taking what sounds like one of the biggest and most difficult bits of engineering in the country. I know something about those Southern ranges. That's probably why you have the nerve even to suggest the proposition to me!"

"It amounts to just this, John: Do you know of a man whom it would be safe to put down there as acting chief engineer in your absence, and two first-class assistants for him? All three, men whom you can trust to the limit?"

"If they're available—yes. But men of that grade are usually tied up a year or more ahead. If they happen to be on jobs of secondary importance, they could easily fill their places and free themselves for more important work—but the chance of getting them may be a waiting one."

"If we had the acting-chief, we could wait six months for the assistants, if we had to. With your wide professional acquaintance, I'm banking on your finding a chief within a few weeks. Point is—that arrangement, with you in supreme charge of the whole project—your surveys and orders carried out to the letter without question from anybody—you wouldn't have to be down there more than a week or ten days out of every month—giving you all the time you need for your other responsibilities."

"If I didn't go bugs from the overwhelming mass of detail! Great caterpillars, Sam! Do you realize what it means to carry all that load in one human head?"

"M-well—some heads are different from other human heads. They sort of stretch when necessary, you know. Come on—be a sport! I've told you all about Gresham's dream of that shortcut—the man certainly had vision. This afternoon I want you and Joan to meet his daughter, whom you've seen and liked on the screen. In two-three days, I want you two and the girl to run down with me in my private car to a junction on the west side of the mountains. We'll get some Morgan colts, there—can't travel those ridges in motors, though we can have 'em meet us in the valleys. How about it? Will you come down and take a look-see before you positively say no?"

"Yep. I need some relaxation from all this responsibility. The Morgan colt and the mountain air will do me a lot of good—but I won't agree even to think of your

damned shortcut unless I feel in the mood!"

Wentworth merely grinned complacently—he knew the Grigsbys.

THE Grigsbys had met several of the screen favorites in various places—usually "on location," somewhere out of doors—but the combination with an heiress to a large fortune who had no need for the screen as an income-producer was something new. They found Helen Gresham a girl of their own sort as far as first impressions went.

The first evening was spent in a close study of the Government sheets.

Soon after breakfast the next morning John Grigsby returned to these sheets, pencil in hand—saying:

"Charleston or Savannah would be your logical terminal port from the general direction of the territory reached by your system, Sam—and I suppose you've picked Charleston? I would, myself."

"Yes. Locate my terminal yards and warehouses out near the entrance of the harbor, where a little dredging will make it one of the best shipping points in the world—directly accessible to deep water."

"All right—we'll lay this ruler across the map from this junction to Charleston, and see what happens. You want to get as near that ideal straight line as you can—of course. Well, a little further down, the Southern cuts across the ranges in two or three places—with loops and bends like a snake. A lot of lost mileage from the detours—but those people will give you plenty of competition just the same. Of course that system doesn't tap the north-central territory that you do—and your main idea is the through-freight to a coast port with the shortest mileage and no leased lines. All right—figuring the grades and elevations approximately, it'll run to something like this: Three tunnels five or six miles long, through as many ranges—three others, one or two miles—and a skeleton cantilever bridge across Devil's Gorge with the track-deck about eight hundred feet above the creek which runs along the bottom of it. Fortunately, the sides are so precipitous that the thrust-piers needn't be further down that steep pitch than, say, three hundred feet below the track."

"I don't hear you making any stall that the straight-cut idea is impracticable or prohibitively expensive? Any notion how long to build?"

"Depends on how you do it—the old way, or the modern. It's not impracticable. As to expense—you're building for the future, not for the immediate few years. In the old days, when no small road could finance anything like this, they had to go on with what money they could raise—begin at one end and push on until the money gave out—then wait until they raised some more and do the same thing over again.

"The modern way of doing this job requires far more initial expense, but shortens the time and reduces strike-risks or delays so materially that it costs a good forty percent less in the end. We bore tunnels a darned sight faster now than they did thirty years ago—much faster here than in Europe. I'd start all six of those tunnels simultaneously, gangs working at each end—and the bridge—and all track along the mountain-sides where we have to grade to upper or lower levels. Two thousand men for a starter—and a pretty good S.O.S. behind them to keep the material moving."

"Suppose you strike some obstacle which doesn't show on these topographic survey sheets?"

"It would have to be human or atmospheric—the sheets cover practically everything else. But we might as well ride across the ranges and see what turns up. Can't save time or sore muscles with a motor, up there—anywhere. I fetched along a camp-kit and two tents. About six days to ride across, I figure. Two pack-mules in addition to our own mounts—and one mountaineer who is pretty well known up in the hills to go with us."

MISS GRESHAM had been listening to all this rather breathlessly. Joan she had loved at sight—and John Grigsby was something new to her. She could read a topographic map almost as well as any of them—but she couldn't visualize the actual picture as they did. She sensed the fact that this big fine-looking man with a touch of iron-gray at his temples was calmly talking of accomplishments which lesser men would have passed up as too impracticable for consideration—talking of expenditure which seemed impossible for any road to earn and make up in a generation at least. Which prompted her, as one of the principal owners, to ask:

"How do you figure, Mr. Grigsby, that anything so frightfully expensive as this will run to can ever pay the M. N. & E.?"

"Do you remember, approximately, what the population of all territory west of the Mississippi was at the close of the Civil War, Miss Gresham? Any idea what the population of that same section is today—only sixty years later? All of it brought in and settled by the railroads. The Great Smokys and the Alleghenys have a rather limited number of regular inhabitants right now; in fifty years, there'll be ten times as many—all paying passenger mileage on the railroads, all producing something to be shipped, or buying stuff which is shipped in to them. Pay? You bet it'll pay!"

IT was only when the mountaineer brought them to the only possible trail down into Devil's Gorge—he said he'd never attempted going up the other side, himself—that the girl really got a mental picture of that cantilever bridge, like a glistening steel cobweb, way up against the sky. The sheer daring of the conception held her breathless until a new idea crowded out everything else:

"Oh, Mr. Grigsby! Would it be possible, do you suppose—is there any way it might be arranged, do you think—to bring a movie outfit down here with a first-chop director, like Jimmy Grew, and make a picture of that bridge during construction—of the whole proposition—bridge, tunnels, track along the mountain-sides—construction-camps—the night-life in them—all that? Our company recently bought a script which would fit into this like a glove—make it pretty much the real thing all through!"

"Using the plot of your script and your own crowd—or using my men when I need 'em on the job?"

"Using the script as the skeleton of the story, of course, but altering it to fit your job whenever necessary—shooting your men as they work, or play—not otherwise. We furnish the actors and the story—you furnish the atmosphere. Can't you get that picture as it will look on the screen? Oh, please! Can't it be done?"

"D'you know—the idea sort of catches me, too. It's the sort of thing which ought to be done—and if the finished picture is really typical, half a dozen copies should be preserved at the Engineers Club. But—there are some angles to the proposition which you don't get. Er—would you be in the cast?"

"Not noticeably! Good Lord! Can't you see the newspapers? 'Wealthy Movie

Star Films Her Own Railroad.' Publicity stunt for the M. N. & E. Travel on the Movie Line—Star's picture on every ticket.' No! My name would have to be kept strictly out of it. Mary Lester is the one for the part, if I can make Bergmann see her in it. She is without exception the loveliest girl on the screen—with Jack Fennimore playing opposite, they'd make a perfectly corking picture of this! Outdoor stuff is what they both eat up. What were the other angles you spoke of?"

"Increasing the risk of trouble or disaster on the job—for one. Don't overlook the fact that the B. K. & L. crowd, and the Southern as well, haven't exactly favored this development since the rumor got out that your father was considering it. That circus in Wall Street made 'em a heap sorer than they were before. In fact, there are several parties who'll spend money and go way beyond legal methods to see that this shortcut doesn't go through. That's one of the recognized certainties which I have to guard against and discount in advance. Jimmy Grew, from what I've heard of him, is an exceptionally able organizer—he'd probably have his whole outfit pretty well in hand. But it would be almost impossible for him to guarantee everyone he brings down—and the majority of them, undoubtedly, are flask-toters. I can't lay down the law to these mountaineers on the hooch question and have a movie crowd doing what I've forbidden them to do. Of course all such objections can be handled if we have the time to bother with them—which we really haven't. However—you might be feeling out your producers on the subject during the next few months, while we're getting started, and see what sort of a guarantee against damage they can put up. Probably Grew and I can work it out between us.

"Let's see. Give us about fifteen months before the short tunnel will be holed-through to the bridge-deck, and enough of the cantilever structure in place for you to shoot. With the girders and trusses above the thrust-pier at that time, you can shoot the construction-gang at work upon them in the air and get the whole lay-out of the Gorge. Then your mechanics can make a dummy of the Gorge, somewhere, with the completed bridge—for long-shots—and build bits of the middle chord for your close-ups, eight hundred feet in the air. But—wait a bit! We may be counting a lot of unborn chickens. How about it, Sam?

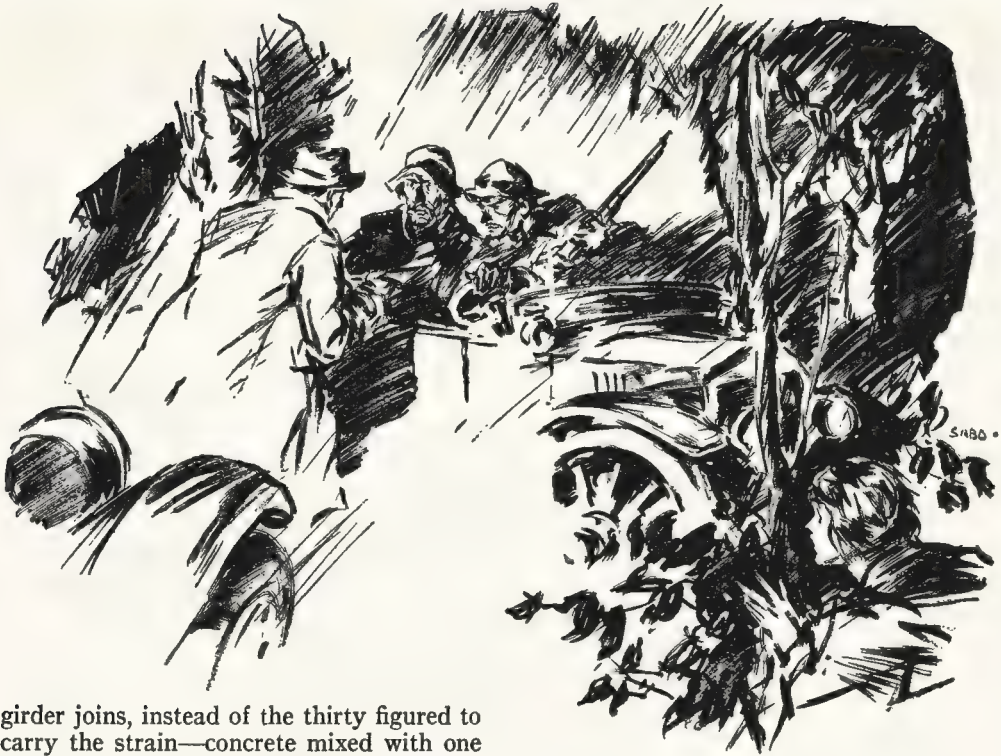
I know you can probably control your board in a vote on this—how do you feel about it? Going through with the scheme—or going to consider it for a while?"

"W-e-l-l—my bill, pretty well camouflaged, was signed by one of the governors three days ago, and the other one has talked with him about it—at the suggestion of a committee from these mountaineers, who want the Cut. In spite of any lobby influence, he'll probably sign—knowing that if he doesn't he won't get a re-nomination. I'd gamble right now that there's nothing to prevent our starting work in ten days if we're ready then. Your getting Tony Wallingford as acting-chief was an even bigger slice of luck! While he's assembling his gangs, tools and material, we'll find two good assistants for him. What are you figuring on, concerning the moonshiners?"

"We'll be riding into the village where Simon Pettigrew lives, tomorrow—he was spokesman for that committee who went down to see Gresham, you know, and is well known for twenty miles around here. Anything he says is likely to go unless it's blocked by one of the Hendees—the other parties in the old feud. But they're kinda half-civilized, these days. There hasn't been a killing for eight years—sometimes Abner Hendee even acts with Simon on questions affecting the neighborhood."

WHEN the little party rode into Coxtonville next day, they were hospitably received by Pettigrew and his neighbors, including a few of the Hendees. In the mysterious way that news travels through the mountain country, a rumor had preceded them that Lem Barrow, from over Westburg way, was riding through with a party of railroad folks who were said to be mixed up with the M. N. & E.—which was quite sufficient to insure a welcome in any of the hill villages. On Pettigrew's veranda, after dinner, Grigsby led the talk around to what he had in mind:

"Gentlemen, we're coming up here to put through construction which is as much for your benefit as ours. We aim to be good neighbors—attending strictly to our own business. If any of our men annoy you, they'll be punished—good and plenty. When it comes to wine and liquor, I like 'em both—when it's in a place where there's no risk of unpleasant consequences from them—but they don't mix with construction-work. Fifteen rivets where a



girder joins, instead of the thirty figured to carry the strain—concrete mixed with one bag of cement where there should be three—red lanterns missing when they would have stopped a train—all mean one sort of frightful catastrophe or other—train-loads of happy decent people sent crashing down to death or mutilation when there's no possible excuse for it. I don't care how much hooch you folks distill, or use, or ship outside, as long as not a drop of it gets to my men—and I wouldn't see one of your stills if I stepped right on top of it. All that is your business—not ours. But if I find it getting to my men on any section of the work, I've got to protect myself and the job—you can see that without argument. I'd have to take whoever supplied the liquor, wherever I caught him, and turn him over to the Government. If the Government didn't stop him, I'd attend to the matter myself next time. We'll start with upward of two thousand men in our gangs—can bring in ten thousand more at a couple of days' notice if we need 'em. This is plain talk, of course—but it's honest talk, and it doesn't leave any doubt of our good intentions toward you. Play fair with us, and you can bet we'll reciprocate. How about it? Do we understand each other?"

Both Pettigrew and Hendee rose from their chairs and extended their hands.

"That's man's talk, Grigsby! We'll meet you halfway!"

"Better wait till the bridge is fined in the middle—then ye'll pull their hull contraption to the bottom o' the Gorge!"

A WEEK later the party were in New York—scattered in various directions upon their own occupations. In looking back upon that ride across the mountains, it seemed almost like a wonderful dream to Helen Gresham—as totally different from her own professional activities as they, in turn, were from those of everyday folk. The dream was vivid enough, however, for her to secure an early interview with Rudolf Bergmann, President of the Great National, at which Director Jimmy Grew was present—and describe for them that little journey so graphically that they visualized Devil's Gorge and the rest of the ridge-country as it might be made to appear upon the screen. She then mentioned the adventure-story recently purchased from a famous novelist and showed how ideal such a setting would be for it—asking them to get a mental picture of Mary Lester's exquisite loveliness in a close-up with that twelve-hundred-foot chasm as background—close-ups of Mary and Jack Fennimore standing over such an abyss upon the steel-work of the great cantilevers before they joined, nights in the construction-camps, brawls, plots and so forth. Grew was strong for the idea.

In another week the whole cast left for the Coast to shoot the local bits and interiors of two historical novels the Great National was filming—and the pressure of other activities almost blotted the engineering picture from Helen Gresham's mind for upwards of a year. Grew, however, had been going over and over the script with his continuity-man to see how closely it could be made to fit the locale. The more they worked, the more enthusiastic they became, Bergmann also, finally.

By the end of two months the director had his people, and all the props which had been decided upon, assembled in a camp on the inner slope of the most westerly ridge—the grade up to the short tunnel communicating with track-level on the Devil's Gorge bridge running along the opposite slope from another tunnel below the camp but a hundred feet higher than the valley-bottom.

Thus far, Grew's contact with the construction force had been through Tony Wallingford and his two assistants—men whom he recognized as exceedingly able executives. But occasionally he noticed little details here and there which seemed to indicate a powerful guiding hand somewhere behind the scenes. And with further glimpses of the steel hand underneath all of the operations, he gradually sensed unbounded respect for the shadowy, impersonal John Grigsby of whom he had no glimpse during the first month. Some of the regulations imposed upon his outfit struck him, at first, as being needlessly strict—unusually so—and his mechanical staff, with an ex-engineer at the top, sometimes got sore enough to disregard them altogether until they were quietly compelled to toe the line.

ONE dark evening when the camp was lighted only by its fires and a few electric flares, some of the actors and Kinney, the mechanical director, suddenly became conscious of two figures standing by their horses back in the shadows—a tall well-built man of very striking appearance, and an equally well-built, handsome woman—both in riding clothes. Leaving their mounts with bridles trailing on the ground, the pair came smilingly up to the fire and glanced around the circle of faces.

"Mr. Kinney around anywhere?"

The mechanical director took a dislike to this quiet stranger at first glance, and rather assertively took a step forward.

"I'm Kinney!" The stranger gave him a straight look—pleasant, but piercing.

"Mr. Kinney, do you know anything about that high-explosive on the gondola up near the entrance to the tunnel?"

"Why? What about it? It's our stuff, of course!"

"So the foreman said. Wanted to know what he should do with it. He knew it was a gross violation of the orders on this job—was waiting until Wallingford came along, to ask about it."

"Say! What interest have you in this matter, anyway? We have official permission for everything we do in this neck of woods!"

"Evidently you have willfully misunderstood some of that authority. Nobody on this job ever gave you permission to bring one ounce of explosive within half a mile of the right-of-way. As for my interest—it's sufficient to give that foreman a few kind words that he won't forget in some time. That stuff has been hauled back through the ridge and stacked outside the limit you were ordered to maintain. I trust for your own sake, Kinney, that you won't repeat the offense."

"Oh, you do! You interfere with our property and you call me a liar, do you?"

"If you want it put as plainly as that—I do."

Kinney's fists were doubled up as he stepped forward. The stranger was no longer smiling, but his voice was still courteous. "Just a moment—before you start something you can't finish! I suppose you have your value in this outfit, Mr. Kinney, or Jimmy Grew wouldn't have brought you up here—evidently he needs whatever ability you may have for certain details connected with this picture. We are all disposed to get along with you folks pleasantly—render all the assistance we can in getting a good picture of this work. But don't lose sight of the fact that we can shut you off from this construction and out of these immediate mountains at any moment it seems necessary! H-m-m—isn't that Grew coming across from the other side of the camp?"

AS Grew reached them, he promptly accepted the outstretched hand—asking what the argument was about. The stranger mentioned the gondola-load of high-explosive, and what had been done with it. The director whirled about to his subordinate, his face blazing with anger:

"What ever possessed you to bring that stuff along the line of construction, Kinney? You knew what our orders were!"

"Ah—orders! Orders! There's so much damned red-tape about this job that it's enough to make a monkey sick! I'm a graduate engineer, myself—know the whole game—wouldn't do anything that meant unnecessary risk! But we've got to have that stuff down in Devil's Gorge for our big explosion, haven't we? It's too damn risky taking it over those steep trails on mules! Only safe way of getting it into the Gorge is on a gondola through

outside and make a dummy of the Gorge in that—very easily faked—then shoot your explosion in it. Er—any objection to our looking through your camp, Grew?"

By this time it was beginning to dawn upon the director who his visitors must be. They had attracted him as kindred spirits in the first glance. Mary Lester and Fenimore had come over from another fire and were getting acquainted with the handsome woman in riding-breeches. When the five were beyond Kinney's hearing, the stranger said:

"I know it must have struck you, Grew, that we're a bit more strict on this construction than is usually the case—but there are reasons. First place, we have



She raced to the right-of-way and the nearest section-shack as fast as she dared let the horse travel.

the short tunnel and then lower it with tackle from the cantilever!"

The stranger's gaze grew ominous.

"This is the first any of us have heard about a big explosion in the Gorge—presumably one of those many little changes you movie-folks are always running into the continuity as you go along. Now let's settle this question so that it won't come up again. I don't believe Grew knew anything about this idea—if he's examined that Gorge carefully! There isn't going to be any big explosion, because we have to handle the reduced charges in our blasting with the utmost care to prevent dislodging stone and earth by the thousand tons! Find some little cleft in the ridges

much more difficult engineering problems, here, than along the average line. Then—there are two or three big railway systems which do not intend that this shortcut ever shall go through. We have to keep on edge against *sabotage* or worse every minute—got to outguess the other crowd and be ready for 'em when they start anything. That's why it was put up to you personally, at the start, to guarantee every man or woman you brought up here. We're all of us keen upon having you make such an engineering picture as never was shown before—and before you get through, you'll be just as keen upon having our work go to completion in spite of any obstacle or underhand devilment that may come up.

"But as to our strict regulations—you can see, now, why we don't want your outfit more than two hundred feet inside the entrance to any of our tunnels. That's far enough for you to get all the interior shots you need, and there is far less risk of anybody getting hurt with falling rock. There's also less risk from even the one maverick who *might* have wormed his way into your crowd. Kinney probably had no intention of doing anything that would have been a serious risk to our construction—he's just built that way—cocksure, impatient. I seem to remember a 'Lucius Kinney' on one of the banana railroads in Nicaragua, not long ago—second assistant. Likely it's the same fellow. Tony Wallingford might know—if I jogged his memory."

NOW Mary Lester had spotted the two strangers in the shadows before Kinney and his companions saw them. When the dispute started, she had edged a little closer until she caught every word of it—some instinct, possibly, to protect a woman who attracted her. As she watched Grigsby, his courteous manner and absolute mastery of the situation appealed to her as nothing about a man ever had before. Nothing would have pleased her better at the moment than to have Kinney start something—she was so perfectly sure of what he'd get. When the five of them walked away through the camp, she listened closely to the talk between Jimmy Grew and the engineer—particularly, what was said about rival systems being determined to prevent the work from going through, and the data on Kinney's Nicaraguan job. Later, from Joan Grigsby, she learned that the B. K. & L. was the most unscrupulous rival of the M. N. & E.—and that a William T. Schenck was its president, with offices in the Bankers' Trust Building.

Something, at the back of her mind, seemed trying to establish a connection between a vague scrap of gossip concerning one of the engineers on a Nicaraguan banana railway as having come down there from a minor job with the B. K. & L.—Kinney's coming into the movie-business six months before as a former engineer who made an excellent mechanical director whom Bergmann considered a "find"—and an impression that she had, sometime recently, noticed him coming out of some railway office in the Bankers' Trust, where her own brokers' offices were. It was all

confused—chaotic. Had she liked Kinney, she wouldn't have given the matter a second thought, but she and Jack Fennimore strongly disliked the man.

And from that moment Mary Lester watched the mechanical director like a cat.

Of course it was impossible to keep Kinney under constant surveillance because he was frequently working out some mechanical prop twenty miles from where her scenes were being shot. But in camp, each evening, Mary managed to check up on where he had been and what doing. She hadn't a shred of actual evidence upon which to found a suspicion of the man—nothing beyond a few vague recollections and his manner with Grigsby over the dynamite question. And for a year the ex-engineer did absolutely nothing which could be criticized. Meanwhile,—having finished their shooting of everything as far as the work had progressed,—the whole outfit went to the Coast for work upon another picture, returning in the spring when the foliage was out.

When the concrete piers and abutments for the cantilevers had been constructed halfway up the precipitous sides of Devil's Gorge, a motor trail of easy gradient had been slanted down from the lowest part of the ridge, two miles beyond the bridge on one side, and from an opposite point farther north, on the other. In the two years since the foundations had been laid, young growths of birch, laurel and fast-growing shrubs had sprung up until the "gash" of the trails was almost concealed—and quite a growth had sprung up around the steel-work on top of the piers themselves, where soil had dropped and seed had lodged.

When the outfit came up the second time, Miss Lester noticed Kinney talking with a couple of mountaineers at the junction when they were stowing the gondolas for the trip up to camp. These men rode away in a dingy old car which nevertheless seemed in first-class running order, its motor purring away almost noiselessly. The girl noticed its general shape and three or four identifying marks; then her attention was taken up with a pet colt she had brought along to ride.

A FEW nights afterward, when the heavily banked clouds began squeezing out a steady drizzling rain which obscured objects a short distance away, she saw Kinney come out of his office-shack in a heavy poncho and drive away in his flivver as if

he were going across the range to the junction and its little surrounding village. Some instinct put it into her mind that he might be going to some rendezvous instead—so she threw a blanket and saddle on Jeremiah and was riding along the junction road in just eight minutes. Kinney had the advantage of seeing where he was going, with his lights—but Jeremiah knew the road with his eyes shut and could be trusted to canter along the level stretches without going off down the slopes, as the man was afraid of doing if he skidded. Presently she caught the reflection of his lights on the bushes and kept in sight without getting near enough for him to hear her pony's hoofbeats. At the fork where one road turned across the ridge and down to the junction, another one led on over the second ridge and down the Gorge to the cantilever piers. Up this road a short distance Kinney found another car which his lights revealed to the girl as the one in which the rough mountaineers had ridden away. Tying Jeremiah in the thick bushes by the side of the road, she sneaked up until she could hear what they were saying, and see Kinney passing over a thick wad of yellow-backs.

"All kerrect, Boss. The stuff's planted in the bushes top o' thur nigh pier whar taint likely Grigsby's men'll notice it. They wuz yere yestiddy—wont go down thar ag'in f'r a week er more. Wire leads back ter a detonatin'-box jes' back of er white stun on thur left side o' thur road top o' thur ridge. Ye kin tech her off any time ye like—but seems though ye better wait till thur bridge is plumb j'ined in thur middle—bout three-fo' days. Then ye'll pull thur hull damn contraption down to the bottom o' the Gorge!"

Slipping back to where Jeremiah stood patiently waiting for her, and pinching his nose to stifle a whinny of greeting, Mary walked him softly back far enough to prevent their hearing him—then raced to the right-of-way and the nearest section-shack as fast as she dared let him travel. Here she found Hennessy, the section foreman—told him to look after Jeremiah—grabbed his telephone, and began calling Division Headquarters, where she hoped to catch Grigsby. He had gone north again, but Tony Wallingford answered the phone.

"Come down quick to Section Five shack, Mr. Wallingford. Velocipede will do if there's no juice in the rail for one of the motors—which would be a heap better! Mary Lester talking! Urgent! Serious!"

AS Grigsby always had one of the dynamos running night and day in the power-house for emergency use, one of the big construction-train motors came whizzing down the grade on the opposite mountain-slope—reaching the shack in ten minutes—taking Mary aboard, and racing back up to the bridge-tunnel as she breathlessly gave Wallingford the gist of what she'd seen and heard. When the motor stopped before headquarters at the end of the bridge, which he said would be completely joined inside of forty-eight hours, she told him to get wire-nippers and a pocket flashlight—then ran to the top of the ladders which led downward through the steel framing, three hundred feet to the top of the concrete pier upon which it rested. He yelled to stop her, but she beat him to the ladder and disappeared down it like a squirrel in the darkness and rain—which made it less terrifying in some ways, but more so in others than it would have been in daylight.

As he had both torch and pliers in his pockets—was rarely without them—he followed as fast as he quietly and steadily could, calling down that she mustn't step off onto the pier until he got ahead of her. There were three possibilities which made the strength fairly ooze from his arms and legs; that she might lose her grip and fall the eight hundred feet to the bottom of the Gorge; that she might slip from the lower ladders and fall upon the explosive, setting it off; that she might trip over the wire on top of the pier and give it a yank that would explode the stuff.

Neither of the three happened—but they were both nearly all in when he got his arms around her at the bottom of the ladder and rested for a moment before he started to explore. Without using his torch,—for excellent reasons,—he felt along the edge of the concrete until his fingers touched the heavily insulated wire—and cut it. Then, with his arms grasping the steel ladders around her knees, he helped her climb up again until, at the top, he turned on his flash-lamp, and they made their way to the headquarters shack just inside the tunnel entrance.

WITH her promise to be good and not try any further fool stunts that night, Wallingford gave an excellent impersonation of a man who gets things done by sheer dynamic force. Within two hours he had an emergency-derrick securely braced on

On Location

the edge of the bridge-deck over the abyss—blocks and falls, fitted with wire-cable, lowered away down to the pier-head with a large and very carefully padded basket. Going down in this with his blasting chief and electrician, they very cautiously felt along the end of the wire until they found the explosive in the bushes—lifted it out—packed it gingerly in the basket, and sent the whole of it up in two loads—afterward running it out to the magazine at some distance from the right-of-way, heavily guarded. They dared not leave it until daylight, for had the cutting of the wire been discovered, the mountaineers could easily have set it off by shooting at it from up the Gorge. At one o'clock in the morning, Wallingford stumbled into the shack and asked the still wide-awake girl on the couch "what in hell" she went down those ladders for.

"Because I'd been watching Kinney's face in the light from his car-lamps. He had more than half a mind to explode that stuff *tonight*, and then remove the wire—as being safer for him. I thought I might feel along that wire and find a place where it could be disconnected—and—besides—I couldn't have stayed up top and waited, while you went down alone—I'd have gone crazy, expecting every second that the whole world was going to smash!"

"But, dammit—the cuss was just as likely to explode it while you were going down or feeling along that wire!"

"That climb sort of—kept my mind off from that, though!"

The Grigsbys returned to see the bridge finally joined, and ran the first train over it. From the opposite side of the Gorge the entire movie-outfit—excepting Kinney, who was "detained" elsewhere—and the construction-gangs for that section—got a clear view of just what Mary and Wallingford had done in the darkness and rain two nights before. It looked much worse under a bright noon sun.

"That stunt has simply got to go in the picture!" exclaimed Jimmy Grew, who, with Fennimore and the continuity editor, had been visualizing the whole dramatic occurrence. "We'll shoot the scene at night, from a basket, with an occasional flare to show the depth—"

And as they discussed these details, Mary Lester, her eyes glowing, murmured to the Grigsbys: "The picture—and the shortcut; they'll *both* be marvellous productions won't they?"

The Enemy Strikes

By

AGATHA CHRISTIE

I T was after the tragic death of Miss Flossie Monro that I began to be aware of a change in Poirot. Up to now, his invincible confidence in himself had stood the test. But it seemed as though at last the long strain was beginning to tell. His manner was grave and brooding, his nerves on edge. He avoided all discussion of the Four as far as possible, and seemed to throw himself into his ordinary work with almost his old ardor. Nevertheless, I knew that he was still secretly active in the big matter.

So matters went on until the end of March, and then one morning Poirot made a remark which startled me considerably.

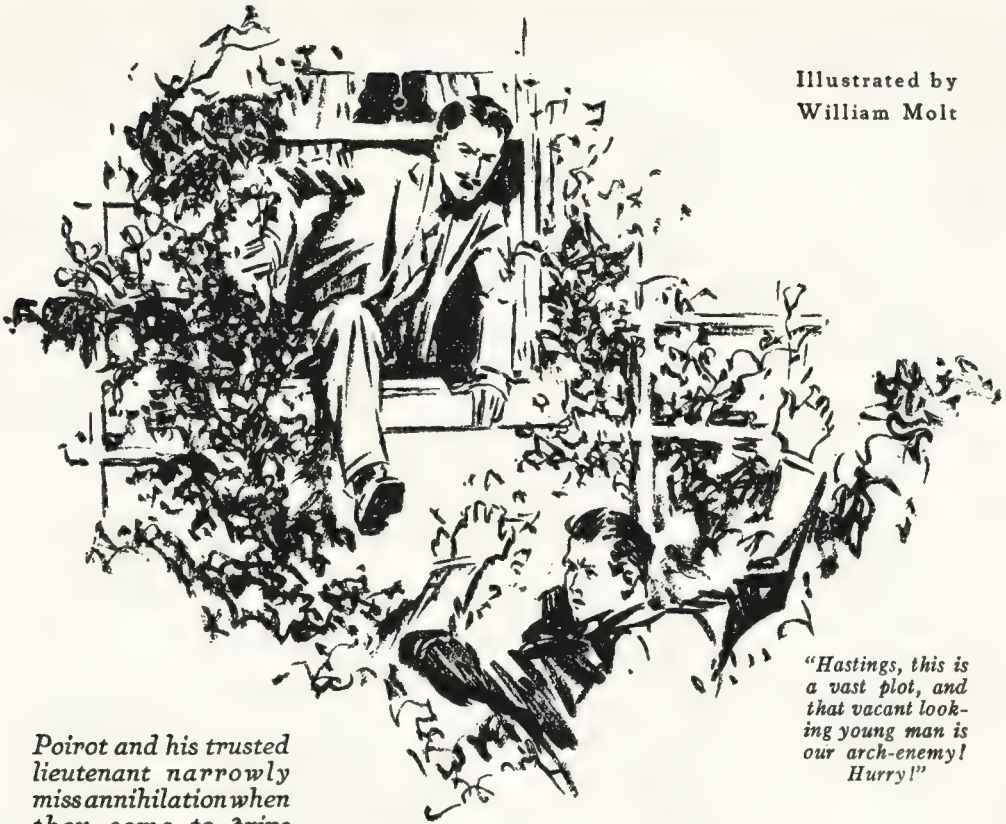
"This morning, my friend, I should recommend the best suit. We go to call upon the Home Secretary."

"Indeed? That is very exciting. He has called you in to take up a case?"

"Not exactly. The interview is of my seeking. You may remember my saying that I once did him some small service? He is inclined to be foolishly enthusiastic over my capabilities in consequence, and I am about to trade on this attitude of his. As you know, the French premier, M. Desjardeaux, is over in London, and at my request the Home Secretary has arranged for him to be present at our little conference this morning."

The Right Honorable Sydney Crowther, His Majesty's Secretary of State for Home Affairs, was a well-known and popular figure. A man of some fifty years of age, with a quizzical expression and shrewd gray eyes, he received us with that delightful *bonhomie* of manner which was well known to be one of his principal assets.

Illustrated by
William Molt



Poirot and his trusted lieutenant narrowly miss annihilation when they come to grips with the sinister Four.

"Hastings, this is a vast plot, and that vacant looking young man is our arch-enemy! Hurry!"

Standing with his back to the fireplace was a tall, thin man with a pointed black beard and a sensitive face.

"M. Desjardeaux," said Crowther, "allow me to introduce to you M. Hercule Poirot, of whom you may perhaps already have heard."

The Frenchman bowed and shook hands.

"I have indeed heard of M. Hercule Poirot," he said pleasantly; "who has not?"

"You are too amiable, monsieur," said Poirot, bowing; but his face flushed with pleasure.

"Any word for an old friend?" asked a quiet voice, and a man came forward from a corner by a tall bookcase.

It was our old acquaintance Mr. Ingles.

"And now, M. Poirot," said Crowther, "we are at your service. I understood you to say that you had a communication of the utmost importance to make to us?"

"That is so, monsieur. There is in the world today a vast organization—an organization of crime. It is controlled by four individuals, who are known and spoken of as the Four. Number One is a Chinaman,

Li Chang Yen; Number Two is the American multimillionaire Abe Ryland; Number Three is a Frenchwoman; Number Four, I have every reason to believe, is an obscure English actor called Claud Darrell. These four are banded together to destroy the existing order, and to replace it with an anarchy in which they would reign as dictators."

"Incredible," muttered the Frenchman. "Ryland, mixed up with a thing of that kind? Surely the idea is too fantastic."

"Listen, monsieur, whilst I recount to you some of the doings of this Four."

IT was an enthralling narrative which Poirot unfolded. Familiar as I was with all the details, they thrilled me anew as I heard the bald recital of our adventures and escapes.

M. Desjardeaux looked mutely at Mr. Crowther as Poirot finished. The other answered the look.

"Yes, M. Desjardeaux, I think we must admit the existence of a Four. Scotland Yard was inclined to jeer at first, but they have been forced to admit that M. Poirot was right in many of his claims. The only question is the extent of its aims. I cannot

but feel that M. Poirot—er—exaggerates a little.”

For answer Poirot set forth ten salient points. I have been asked not to give them to the public even now, and so I refrain from doing so, but they included the extraordinary disasters to submarines which occurred in a certain month, and also a series of airplane accidents and forced landings. According to Poirot, these were all the work of the Four, and bore witness to the fact that they were in possession of various scientific secrets unknown to the world at large.

This brought us straight to the question which I had been waiting for the French premier to ask.

“You say that the third member of this organization is a Frenchwoman. Have you any idea of her name?”

“It is a well-known name, monsieur, an honored name. Number Three is no less than the celebrated Madame Olivier.”

At the mention of the world-famous scientist, M. Desjardeaux positively bounded from his chair, his face purple with emotion.

“Madame Olivier! Impossible! Absurd! It is an insult what you say there!”

Poirot shook his head gently, but made no answer.

Desjardeaux looked at him in stupefaction for some moments.

“This Li Chang Yen, too,” continued M. Desjardeaux then. “Who has ever heard of him?”

“I have,” said the unexpected voice of Mr. Ingles.

THE Frenchman stared at him, and he stared placidly back again, looking more like a Chinese idol than ever.

“Mr. Ingles,” explained the Home Secretary, “is the greatest authority we have on the interior of China.”

“And you have heard of this Li Chang Yen?”

“Until M. Poirot here came to me, I imagined that I was the only man in England who had. Make no mistake, M. Desjardeaux, there is only one man in China who counts today—Li Chang Yen. He has, perhaps, the finest brain in the world at the present time.”

M. Desjardeaux sat as though stunned. Presently, however, he rallied.

“There may be something in what you say, M. Poirot,” he said coldly. “But as regards Madame Olivier, you are most cer-

tainly mistaken. She is a true daughter of France, and devoted solely to the cause of science.”

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

“That is all I have to say, messieurs—to warn you. I thought it likely that I should not be believed. But at least, you will be on your guard. My words will sink in, and each fresh event that comes along will confirm your wavering faith. It was necessary for me to speak now; later I might not be able to do so.”

“You mean?” asked Crowther, impressed in spite of himself by the gravity of Poirot’s tone.

“I mean, monsieur, that since I have penetrated the identity of Number Four, my life is not worth an hour’s purchase. He will seek to destroy me at all costs—and not for nothing is he named ‘the Destroyer.’ Messieurs, I salute you. To you, M. Crowther, I deliver this key, and this sealed envelope. I have got together all my notes on the case, and my ideas as to how best to meet the menace that any day may break upon the world, and have placed them in a certain safe-deposit. In the event of my death, M. Crowther, I authorize you to take charge of those papers and make what use you can of them. And now, messieurs, I wish you good day.”

Desjardeaux merely bowed coldly, but Crowther sprang up and held out his hand.

“You have converted me, M. Poirot. Fantastic as the whole thing seems, I believe utterly in the truth of what you have told us.”

Ingles left at the same time as we did.

“I am not disappointed with the interview,” said Poirot, as we walked along. “I did not expect to convince Desjardeaux, but I have at least insured that if I die, my knowledge does not die with me.”

“I’m with you, as you know,” said Ingles. “By the way, I’m going out to China as soon as I can get off.”

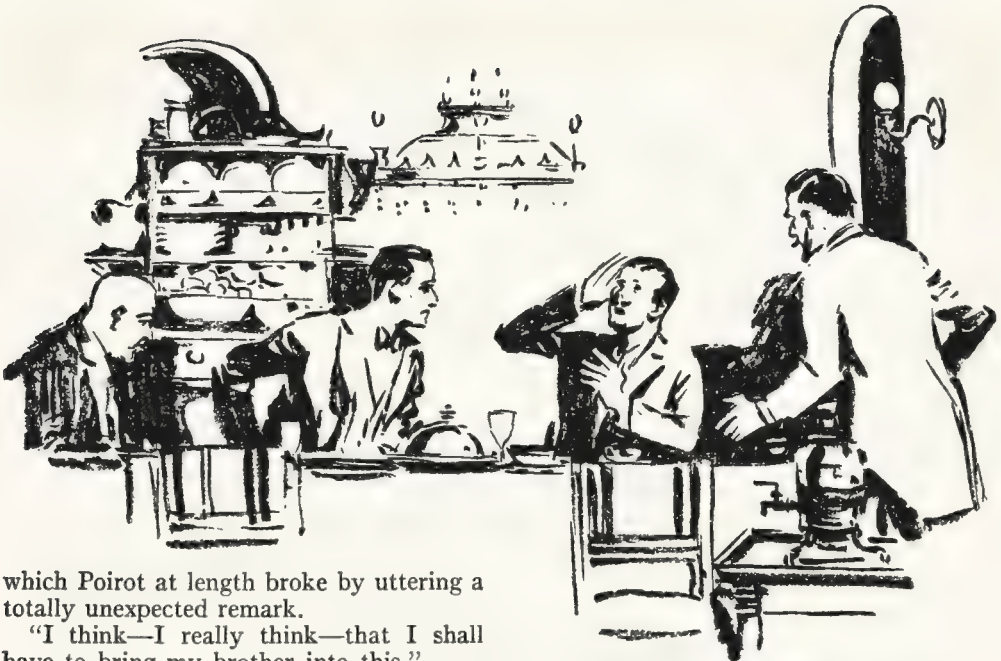
“Is that wise?”

“No,” said Ingles dryly. “But it’s necessary. I don’t suppose I shall be in more danger in China than you are in London.”

“That is possibly true enough,” admitted Poirot. “I hope that they will not succeed in destroying Hastings also, that is all. That would annoy me greatly.”

I interrupted this cheerful conversation to remark that I had no intention of letting myself be massacred, and shortly afterwards Ingles parted from us.

For some time we went along in silence,



which Poirot at length broke by uttering a totally unexpected remark.

"I think—I really think—that I shall have to bring my brother into this."

"Your brother!" I cried, astonished. "I never knew you had a brother!"

"You surprise me, Hastings. Do you not know that all celebrated detectives have brothers who would be even more celebrated than they are, were it not for constitutional indolence?"

Poirot sometimes employs a peculiar manner which makes it well-nigh impossible to know whether he is joking or in earnest; that manner was now very evident.

"What is your brother's name?" I asked, trying to adjust myself to this new idea.

"Achille Poirot," replied Poirot gravely. "He lives near Spa in Belgium."

"What does he do?" I asked with some curiosity, putting aside a half-formed wonder as to the character and disposition of the late Madame Poirot, and her classical taste in Christian names.

"He does nothing. He is, as I tell you, of a singularly indolent disposition. But his abilities are hardly less than my own."

"Is he older than you, or younger?"

"He happens to have been born on the same day."

"A twin!" I cried.

"Exactly, Hastings. You jump to the right conclusion with unflinching accuracy. But here we are at home again. Let us at once get to work on that little affair of the Duchess' necklace."

But the Duchess' necklace was doomed to wait a while. A case of quite another description was waiting for us.

Our landlady, Mrs. Pearson, at once in-

Suddenly Poirot lay back, his face contorted. "My dear sir, what's the matter?" cried the Doctor.

formed us that a hospital nurse had called and was waiting to see Poirot.

We found her sitting in the big armchair facing the window, a pleasant-faced woman of middle age, in a dark blue uniform. She was a little reluctant to come to the point, but Poirot soon put her at her ease, and she embarked upon her story.

"You see, M. Poirot, I've never come across anything of the kind before. I was sent for, from the Lark Sisterhood, to go down to a case in Hertfordshire. An old gentleman, it is, Mr. Templeton. Quite a pleasant house, and quite pleasant people. The wife, Mrs. Templeton, is much younger than her husband, and he has a son by his first marriage who lives there. I don't know that the young man and the step-mother always get on together. He's not quite what you'd call normal—not 'wanting' exactly, but decidedly dull in the intellect. Well, this illness of Mr. Templeton's seemed to me from the first to be very mysterious. At times there seemed really nothing the matter with him, and then he suddenly has one of these gastric attacks with pain and vomiting. But the doctor seemed quite satisfied, and it wasn't for me to say anything. But I couldn't help thinking about it. And then—"

She paused, and became rather red.

"Something happened which aroused your suspicions?" suggested Poirot.

"Yes."

"About Mr. Templeton's illness?"

"Oh, no. About—about—"

"Mrs. Templeton and the doctor, perhaps?"

Poirot has an uncanny *flair* in these things. The nurse threw him a grateful glance and went on.

"The servants, too, were passing remarks. Then one day I happened to see them together myself—in the garden—"

IT was left at that. Our client was in such an agony of outraged propriety that no one could feel it necessary to ask exactly what she had seen in the garden. She had evidently seen quite enough to make up her own mind on the situation.

"The attacks got worse and worse. Dr. Treves said it was all perfectly natural and to be expected, and that Mr. Templeton could not possibly live long; but I've never seen anything like it before myself—not in all my long experience of nursing. It seemed to me like some form of—"

She paused, hesitating.

"Arsenical poisoning?" said Poirot helpfully.

She nodded.

"And then too, he, the patient, I mean, said something queer. 'They'll do for me, the four of them. They'll do for me yet.'"

"Eh?" said Poirot quickly.

"Those were his very words, M. Poirot. He was in great pain at the time, of course, and hardly knew what he was saying."

"'They'll do for me, the four of them,' " repeated Poirot, thoughtfully. "What did he mean by 'the four of them,' do you think?"

"That I can't say, M. Poirot. I thought perhaps he meant his wife and son and the doctor and perhaps Miss Clark, Mrs. Templeton's companion. That would make four, wouldn't it? He might think they were all in league against him."

"Quite so, quite so," said Poirot in a pre-occupied voice. "What about food? Could you take no precautions about that?"

"I'm always doing what I can. But of course sometimes Mrs. Templeton insists on bringing him his food herself, and then there are the times when I am off duty."

"Exactly. And you are not sure enough of your ground to go to the police?"

The nurse's face showed her horror at the mere idea.

"What I have done, M. Poirot, is this: Mr. Templeton had a very bad attack after partaking of a bowl of soup. I took a little

from the bottom of the bowl afterward, and have brought it up with me. I have been spared for the day to visit a sick mother, as Mr. Templeton was well enough to be left."

She drew out a little bottle of dark fluid and handed it to Poirot.

"Excellent, mademoiselle. We will have this analyzed immediately. If you will return here in, say, an hour's time, I think that we shall be able to dispose of your suspicions one way or another."

First extracting from our visitor her name and qualifications, he ushered her out. Then he wrote a note and sent it off, together with the bottle of soup. While we waited to hear the result, Poirot amused himself by verifying the nurse's credentials, somewhat to my surprise.

"So far, so good," he said with a twinkle. "And now here comes Nurse Palmer back again; and here also is our analyst's report."

Both the nurse and I waited anxiously while Poirot read the analyst's report.

"Is there arsenic in it?" she asked breathlessly.

"There is no arsenic in it," rejoined Poirot. "But there is antimony. And, that being the case, we will start immediately for Hertfordshire. Pray heaven that we are not too late!"

WE decided the simplest plan was for Poirot to represent himself truly as a detective, but that the ostensible reason of his visit should be to question Mrs. Templeton about a servant formerly in her employment whose name he obtained from Nurse Palmer, and whom he could represent as being concerned in a jewel robbery.

It was late when we arrived at Elmstead, as the house was called. We had allowed Nurse Palmer to precede us by about twenty minutes, so that there should be no question of our all arriving together.

We were not long left waiting. A squarely built man with a small red mustache and pince-nez came in.

"Dr. Treves," he introduced himself. "Mrs. Templeton asked me to make her excuses to you. She's in a very bad state, you know. Nervous strain. Worry over her husband and all that. I've prescribed bed and bromide. But she hopes you'll stay and take pot luck, and I'm to do host. We've heard of you down here, M. Poirot, and we mean to make the most of you. Ah, here's Micky."

A shambling young man entered the room. He had a very round face, and foolish-looking eyebrows raised as though in perpetual surprise. He grinned awkwardly as he shook hands. This was clearly the "wanting" son.

Presently we all went in to dinner. Dr. Treves left the room,—to open some wine, I think,—and suddenly the boy's physiognomy underwent a startling change. He leaned forward, staring at Poirot.

"You've come about Father," he said, nodding his head. "I know. I know lots of things—but nobody thinks I do. Mother will be glad when Father's dead and she can marry Dr. Treves. She isn't my own mother, you know. I don't like her. She wants Father to die."



It was all rather horrible. Luckily, before Poirot had time to reply, the Doctor came back, and we had to carry on a forced conversation.

Suddenly Poirot lay back in his chair with a hollow groan. His face was contorted with pain.

"My dear sir, what's the matter?" cried the Doctor.

"A sudden spasm. I am used to them. No, no, I require no assistance from you, Doctor. If I might lie down upstairs—"

His request was instantly acceded to,

and I accompanied him upstairs, where he collapsed on the bed, groaning heavily.

For the first minute or two I had been taken in, but I had quickly realized that Poirot was—as he would have put it—playing the comedy; his object was to be left alone upstairs near the patient's room.

Hence I was quite prepared when, the instant we were alone, he sprang up.

"Quick, Hastings, the window! There is ivy outside. We can climb down before they begin to suspect."

"Climb down?"

"Yes, we must get out of this house at once. You saw him at dinner?"

"The Doctor?"

"No, young Templeton. His trick with his bread. Do you remember what Flossie Monro told us before she died? That Claud Darrell had a habit of dabbing his

bread on the table to pick up crumbs. Hastings, this is a vast plot, and that vacant-looking young man is our arch enemy—*Number Four!* Hurry!”

I did not wait to argue. Incredible as the whole thing seemed, it was wiser not to delay. We scrambled down the ivy as quietly as we could and made a bee-line for the small town and the railway station. We were just able to catch the last train, the eight-thirty-four, which would land us in town about eleven o'clock.

“A plot,” said Poirot, thoughtfully. “How many of them were in it, I wonder? I suspect that the whole Templeton family are just so many agents of the Four. Did they simply want to decoy us down there? Or was it more subtle than that? Did they intend to play the comedy down there and keep me interested until they had had time to do—what? I wonder now.”

He remained very thoughtful.

Arrived at our lodgings, he restrained me at the door of the sitting-room.

“Attention, Hastings. I have my suspicions. Let me enter first.”

He did so, and to my slight amusement took the precaution to press on the electric switch with an old galosh. Then he went round the room like a strange cat, cautiously, delicately, on the alert for danger.

“It’s all right, Poirot,” I said impatiently.

“It seems so, *mon ami*, it seems so. But let us make sure.”

“Rot,” I said. “I shall light the fire, anyway, and have a pipe. I’ve caught you out for once. You had the matches last, and you didn’t put them back in the holder as usual—the very thing you’re always cursing me for not doing.”

I stretched out my hand. I heard Poirot’s warning cry—saw him leaping toward me—my hand touched the match-box.

Then—a flash of blue flame—an ear-rending crash—and darkness.

I CAME to myself to find the familiar face of our old friend Dr. Ridgeway bending over me. An expression of relief passed over his features.

“Keep still,” he said soothingly. “You’re all right. There’s been an accident, you know.”

“Poirot?” I murmured.

“You’re in my digs. Everything’s quite all right.”

A cold fear clutched at my heart.

“Poirot?” I reiterated. “What of him?”

“By a miracle you escaped. Poirot—did not!”

A cry burst from my lips.

“Not dead? Not dead?”

Ridgeway bowed his head solemnly.

I fell back, fainting.

EVEN now I can hardly bear to write of those days in March.

Poirot—the unique, the inimitable Hercule Poirot—dead! Killed by the explosion so cunningly arranged in our rooms during our absence in Hertfordshire. There was a particularly diabolical touch in the disarranged match-box which was certain to catch Poirot’s eye, and which he would hasten to rearrange—and thereby touch off the explosion. That, as a matter of fact, it was I who actually precipitated the catastrophe never ceased to fill me with unavailing remorse. It was, as Doctor Ridgeway said, a miracle indeed that I had not been killed, but had escaped with a slight concussion.

Although it had seemed to me as though I regained consciousness almost immediately, it was in reality over twenty-four hours before I came back to life. It was not until the evening of the day following that I was able to stagger feebly into an adjoining room, and view with deep emotion the plain elm coffin which held the remains of one of the most marvelous men this world has ever known.

From the very first moment of regaining consciousness I had had only one purpose in mind—to avenge Poirot’s death, and to hunt down the Four remorselessly.

I had thought that Ridgeway would have been of one mind with me about this, but to my surprise the good doctor seemed unaccountably lukewarm.

“Get back to South America,” was his advice, tendered on every occasion. “Why attempt the impossible?” In short, his opinion amounted to this: If Poirot, the unique Poirot, had failed, was it likely that I should succeed?

But I was obstinate. Putting aside any question as to whether I had the necessary qualifications for the task, it was, with me, a question of feeling. My friend had been foully murdered. Was I to go tamely back to South America without an effort to bring his murderers to justice?

I said all this and more to Ridgeway, who listened attentively enough.

“All the same,” he said when I had finished, “my advice does not vary. I am

earnestly convinced that Poirot himself, if he were here, would urge you to return. In his name, I beg of you, Hastings, abandon these wild ideas, and go back to your ranch."

To that only one answer was possible and, shaking his head sadly, he said no more.

It was a month before I was fully restored to health. Towards the end of April, I sought and obtained an interview with the Home Secretary.

"The first warning," he said softly. "You will be well advised not to disregard it!"



Mr. Crowther's manner was reminiscent of that of Dr. Ridgeway. It was soothing and negative. While appreciating the offer of my services, he gently and considerably declined them. The papers referred to by Poirot had passed into his keeping, and he assured me that all possible steps were being taken to deal with the approaching menace.

With that cold comfort I was forced to be satisfied. Mr. Crowther ended the interview by urging me to return to South America. I found the whole thing profoundly unsatisfactory.

I should, I suppose, in its proper place, have described Poirot's funeral. It was a solemn and moving ceremony, and I was frankly overcome by emotion as I stood by the grave-side and thought of all our varied

experiences and the happy days we had passed together. . . .

By the beginning of May I had mapped out a plan of campaign. I felt that I could not do better than keep to Poirot's scheme of advertising for any information respecting Claud Darrell, and I had an advertisement to this effect inserted in a number of morning newspapers. I was sitting in a small restaurant in Soho, and judging of the effect of the advertisement, when a small paragraph in another part of the paper gave me a nasty shock.

Very briefly, it reported the mysterious disappearance of Mr. John Ingles from the S. S. *Shanghai* shortly after the latter had

left Marseilles. Although the weather was perfectly smooth, it was feared that the unfortunate gentleman must have fallen overboard. The paragraph ended with a brief reference to Mr. Ingles' long and distinguished service in China.

The news was unpleasant. I read into Ingles' death a sinister motive. Not for one moment did I believe the theory of an accident. Ingles had been murdered, and his death was only too clearly the handiwork of that accursed Four.

As I sat there, stunned by the blow, and turning the whole matter over in my mind, I was startled by the remarkable behavior of the man sitting opposite me. So far I had not paid much attention to him. He was a thin, dark man of middle age, sallow of complexion, with a small pointed beard.

He had sat down opposite me so quietly that I had hardly noticed his arrival.

But his actions now were decidedly peculiar, to say the very least. Leaning forward, he deliberately helped me to salt, putting it in four little heaps round the edge of my plate.

"You will excuse me," he said in a melancholy voice. "To help a stranger to salt is to help him to sorrow, they say. That may be an unavoidable necessity. I hope not, though. I hope that you will be reasonable."

Then, with a certain significance, he repeated his operations with the salt on his own plate. The symbol 4 was too plain to be missed. I looked at him searchingly. In no way that I could see did he resemble young Templeton, or James the footman, or any other of the various personalities we had come across. Nevertheless, I was convinced that I had to do with no less than the redoubtable Number Four himself. In his voice there was certainly a faint resemblance to the buttoned-up stranger who had called upon us in Paris.

I looked round, undecided as to my course of action. Reading my thoughts, he smiled and gently shook his head.

"I should not advise it," he remarked. "Remember what came of your hasty action in Paris. Let me assure you that my way of retreat is well assured. Your ideas are inclined to be a little crude, Captain Hastings, if I may say so."

"You devil," I said, choking with rage. "You incarnate devil!"

"Heated—just a trifle heated. Your late lamented friend would have told you that a man who keeps calm has always a great advantage."

"You dare to speak of him," I cried. "The man you murdered so foully! And you come here—"

He interrupted me.

"I came here for an excellent and peaceful purpose: to advise you to return at once to South America. If you do so, that is the end of the matter as far as the Four are concerned. You and yours will not be molested in any way. I give you my word as to that."

I laughed scornfully.

"And if I refuse to obey your autocratic command?"

"It is hardly a command. Shall we say that it is—a warning?"

There was a cold menace in his tone.

"The first warning," he said softly.

"You will be well advised not to disregard it."

Then, before I had any hint of his intention, he rose and slipped quickly away toward the door. I sprang to my feet and was after him in a second, but by bad luck I cannoned straight into an enormously fat man who blocked the way between me and the next table. By the time I had disentangled myself, my quarry was just passing through the doorway, and the next delay was from a waiter carrying a huge pile of plates who crashed into me without the least warning. By the time I got to the door, there was no sign of the thin man with the dark beard.

The waiter was fulsome in apologies; the fat man was sitting placidly at a table ordering his lunch. There was nothing to show that both occurrences had not been a pure accident. Nevertheless, I had my own opinion as to that. I knew well enough that the agents of the Four were everywhere.

Needless to say, I paid no heed to the warning given me. I would do or die.

NO further sign came from the Four until about ten days later. I was crossing Hyde Park, lost in thought, when a voice, rich with a persuasive foreign inflection, hailed me.

"Captain Hastings, is it not?"

A big limousine had just drawn up by the pavement. A woman was leaning out. Exquisitely dressed in black, with wonderful pearls, I recognized the lady first known to us as Countess Vera Rossakoff, and afterward under a different *alias* as an agent of the Four. Poirot, for some reason or other, had always had a sneaking fondness for the Countess. Something in her very flamboyance attracted the little man.

"Ah, do not pass on," said the Countess. "I have something most important to say to you. And do not try to have me arrested either, for that would be stupid. You were always a little stupid—yes, yes, it is so. You are stupid now, when you persist in disregarding the warning we sent you. It is the second warning I bring you: Leave England at once. You can do no good here—I tell you that frankly. You will never accomplish anything."

"In that case," I said stiffly, "it seems rather extraordinary that you are all so anxious to get me out of the country."

The Countess shrugged her shoulders.

"For my part, I think that too stupid."



I read and reread this astonishing communication.

I would leave you here to play about happily. But the chiefs, you see, are fearful that some word of yours may give great help to those more intelligent than yourself. Hence—you are to be banished."

The Countess appeared to have a flattering idea of my abilities. I concealed my annoyance. Doubtless this attitude of hers was assumed expressly to annoy me, and to give me the idea that I was unimportant.

"It would, of course, be quite easy to—remove you," she continued, "but I am quite sentimental sometimes. I pleaded for you. You have a nice little wife somewhere, have you not? And it would please the poor little man who is dead to know that you were not to be killed. I always liked him, you know. He was clever!"

I listened in silence and a growing distaste.

"You have the look of a mule when it puts its ears back and kicks. Well, I have delivered my warning. Remember this, the third warning will come by the hand of the destroyer."

She made a sign, and the car whirled away rapidly. I noted the number mechanically, but without the hope that it would lead to anything. The Four were not apt to be careless in details.

I went home a little sobered. One fact had emerged from the Countess' flood of volubility. I was in real danger of my life.

WHILE I was reviewing all these facts, and seeking for the best line of action, the telephone bell rang. I crossed the room and picked up the receiver.

"Yes. Hullo. Who's speaking?"

A crisp voice answered me.

"This is St. Giles Hospital. We have a Chinaman here, knifed in the street and brought in. He can't last long. We rang you up because we found in his pocket a piece of paper with your name and address on it."

I was very much astonished. Nevertheless, after a moment's reflection, I said that I would come down at once. St. Giles Hospital was, I knew, down by the docks, and it occurred to me that the Chinaman might have just come off some ship.

It was on my way down there that a sudden suspicion shot into my mind. Was the whole thing a trap? Wherever a Chinaman was, there might be the hand of Li Chang Yen. I remembered the adventure of the Baited Trap. Was the whole thing a ruse on the part of my enemies?

A little reflection convinced me that at any rate a visit to the hospital would do no harm. It was probable that the thing was not so much a plot as what is vulgarly known as a "plant." The dying Chinaman would make some revelation to me upon which I should act, and which would have the result of leading me into the hands of the Four. The thing to do was to preserve an open mind, and while feigning credulity, be secretly on my guard.

On arriving at St. Giles Hospital, and making my business known, I was taken at once to the accident ward, to the bedside of the man in question. He lay absolutely still, his eyelids closed, and only a very faint movement of the chest showed that

he still breathed. A doctor stood by the bed, his fingers on the Chinaman's pulse.

"He's almost gone," he whispered to me. "You know him, eh?"

I shook my head.

"I've never seen him before."

"Then what was he doing with your name and address in his pocket? You are Captain Hastings, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I can't explain it any more than you can."

"Curious thing. From his papers he seems to have been the servant of a man called Ingles—a retired civil servant."

Ingles' servant! Then I had seen him before. Not that I had ever succeeded in being able to distinguish one Chinaman from another. He must have been with Ingles on his way to China, and after the catastrophe he had returned to England with a message for me. It was vital, imperative that I should hear that message.

EVEN as the thought flashed across my mind, the injured man stirred. His eyes opened. He murmured something incoherently. Then I saw his glance fasten upon me. He made no sign of recognition, but I was at once aware that he was trying to speak to me. Be he friend or foe, I must hear what he had to say.

I leaned over the bed, but the broken sounds conveyed no sort of meaning to me. I thought I caught the word "hand," but in what connection it was used I could not tell. Then it came again, and this time I heard another word, the word "*largo*." I stared in amazement, as the possible juxtaposition of the two suggested itself to me.

"Handel's *Largo*?" I queried.

The Chinaman's eyelids flickered rapidly, as though in assent, and he added another Italian word, the word "*carrozza*." Two or three more words of murmured Italian came to my ears, and then he fell back abruptly. . . .

The doctor pushed me aside. It was all over. The man was dead.

I went out into the air again thoroughly bewildered.

Handel's "*Largo*," and a "*carrozza*." If I remembered rightly, a *carrozza* was a carriage. What possible meaning could lie behind those simple words? The man was a Chinaman, not an Italian; why should he speak in Italian? Surely, if he were indeed Ingles' servant, he must know English. The whole thing was profoundly mystifying. I puzzled over it all the way

home. If only Poirot had been there to solve the problem with his lightning ingenuity!

I let myself in with my latchkey, and went slowly up to my room. A letter was lying on the table, and I tore it open carelessly enough. But in a minute I stood rooted to the ground while I read.

It was a communication from a firm of solicitors.

Dear Sir:

As instructed by our late client, M. Hercule Poirot, we forward you the inclosed letter. This letter was placed in our hands a week before his death, with instructions that in the event of his demise, it should be sent to you at a certain date after his death.

Yours faithfully, etc.

I turned the inclosed missive over and over. It was undoubtedly from Poirot. I knew that familiar writing only too well. With a heavy heart, yet a certain eagerness, I tore it open.

Mon cher ami:

When you receive this, I shall be no more. Do not shed tears about me, but follow my orders. Immediately upon receipt of this, return to South America. Do not be pig-headed about this. It is not for sentimental reasons that I bid you undertake the journey. It is necessary. It is part of the plan of Hercule Poirot! To say more is unnecessary to anyone who has the acute intelligence of my friend Hastings.

A bas the Four! I salute you, my friend, from beyond the grave.

Ever thine,

HERCULE POIROT.

I READ and reread this astonishing communication. One thing was evident: This amazing man had so provided for every eventuality that even his own death did not upset the sequence of his plans! Mine was to be the active part—his the directing genius. Doubtless I should find full instructions awaiting me beyond the seas. In the meantime my enemies, convinced that I was obeying their warning, would cease to trouble their heads about me. I could return, unsuspected, and work havoc in their midst.

There was now nothing to hinder my immediate departure. I sent off cables, booked my passage, and one week later found me embarking on the *Ansonia* on the way to Buenos Aires.

Just as the boat left the quay, a steward brought me a note. It had been given him, so he explained, by a big gentleman in a

fur coat who had left the boat last thing before the gangway planks were lifted.

I opened it. It was terse and to the point.

"*You are wise,*" it ran. It was signed with a big figure 4.

I could afford to smile to myself!

The sea was not too choppy. I enjoyed a passable dinner, made up my mind as to the majority of my fellow-passengers, and had a rubber or two of bridge. Then I turned in and slept like a log, as I always do on board ship.

I was awakened by feeling myself persistently shaken. Dazed and bewildered, I saw that one of the ship's officers was standing over me. He gave a sigh of relief as I sat up.

"Thank the Lord I've got you awake at last. I've had no end of a job. Do you always sleep like that?"

"What's the matter?" I asked, still bewildered and not fully awake. "Is there anything wrong with the ship?"

"I expect you know what's the matter better than I do," he replied dryly. "Special instructions from the Admiralty. A destroyer is waiting to take you off."

"What?" I cried. "In mid-ocean?"

"It seems a most mysterious affair, but that's not my business. They've sent a young fellow aboard who is to take your place, and we are all sworn to secrecy. Will you get up and dress?"

QUITE unable to conceal my amazement, I did as I was told. A boat was lowered, and I was conveyed aboard the destroyer. There I was received courteously, but got no further information. The commander's instructions were to land me at a certain spot on the Belgian coast. There his knowledge and responsibility ended.

The whole thing was like a dream. The one idea I held to firmly was that all this must be part of Poirot's plan. I must simply go forward blindly, trusting in my dead friend.

I was duly landed at the spot indicated. There a motor was waiting, and soon I was rapidly whirling along across the flat Flemish plains. I slept that night at a small hotel in Brussels. The next day we went on again. The country became wooded and hilly. I realized that we were penetrating into the Ardennes, and I suddenly

remembered Poirot's saying that he had a brother who lived at Spa.

But we did not go to Spa itself. We left the main road and wound into the leafy fastnesses of the hills, till we reached a little hamlet, and an isolated white villa high on the hillside. Here the car stopped in front of the green door of the villa.

THE door opened as I alighted. An elderly manservant stood in the doorway bowing.

"*M. le Capitaine Hastings?*" he said in French. "*Monsieur le Capitaine* is expected. If he will follow me."

He led the way across the hall, and flung open a door at the back, standing aside to let me pass in.

I blinked a little, for the room faced west, and the afternoon sun was pouring in. Then my vision cleared, and I saw a figure waiting to welcome me with outstretched hands.

It was—oh, impossible, it couldn't be—but yes!

"Poirot!" I cried, and for once did not attempt to evade the embrace with which he overwhelmed me.

"But yes, but yes, it is indeed I! Not so easy to kill Hercule Poirot!"

"But Poirot—*why?*"

"*A ruse de guerre*, my friend, a *ruse de guerre*. All is now ready for our grand *coup*."

"But you might have told *me*!"

"No, Hastings, I could not. Never, never, in a thousand years, could you have acted your part at the funeral! As it was, it was perfect. It could not fail to carry conviction to the Four."

"But what I've been through—"

"Do not think me too unfeeling. I carried out the deception partly for your sake. I was willing to risk my own life, but I had qualms about continually risking yours. So, after the explosion, I had an idea of great brilliancy. The good Ridgeway, he enables me to carry it out. I am dead; you will return to South America. But, *mon ami*, that is just what you would not do. In the end, I have to arrange a solicitor's letter, and a long rigmarole. But at all events, here you are—that is the great thing. And now we lie here—*perdu*—till the moment comes for the last grand *coup*—the final overthrowing of the accursed Four!"

The inimitable Poirot finds his affair with these super-criminals rapidly approaching a climax—in the next, the January, issue.



FOOLS

By EDWIN L. SABIN

A little drama of the modern West, by a favorite Blue Book Magazine writer who knows his subject well—the author of "White Indian."

THE dusty little touring-car had been parked for the night's camp beneath the spruces whose largesse of needles sweetened the ground and tintured the rippling stream with amber. The ingenious auto tent had been materialized into service, like a prodigy evolved from a magician's hat. Trout had been caught and fried; supper was over.

It was a camp supplied with the essentials of wood, water and meat, and furthermore blessed with happy companionship, for the cross-country migrants were man and woman—or rather, boy and girl—youth upon a honeymoon.

Now in the twilight the boy was again gloating over his latest treasure, procured that noon, fifty miles back, at the refurbished but still venerable road-station that had basked beside the Southwest desert trail.

"I don't see what you want of it, Joe," said the girl.

"Gee, I do! I've always wanted an old six-gun. And this is a dandy—an old frontier forty-five! Loaded, too! A cylinder full of cartridges."

"But what will you do with it?"

"I don't know. Keep it for a relic, I guess. It's the real thing—it belonged to

an old-timer named Hassayampa Bill, the fellow at the service-station said. It's killed a lot of men!"

"Joe!" She shuddered. "No!"

"Why, sure! He was a peace officer down here in New Mexico—marshal or sheriff or something. That's what he carried it for, in those days; to get men he was after or else they'd get him. Of course!"

"How did it come in that store, I wonder?"

"The fellow didn't know. He hasn't been there long. He found it hanging on a nail under a ratty old blanket, behind what used to be the bar. The Mexican who'd been living there told him it was Hassayampa Bill's, and Bill had been a bad *hombre* with it—*mucho* killing. We guessed maybe old Bill had hocked it for the drinks and gone away and left it. That place was a stage-station, once."

"But you haven't any right to it, have you?"

"Sure I have! It had been hanging there for years! Old Bill never came back for it, and the man who owns the place now didn't want it, so I gave him a dollar and took it. It's no good, anyhow, but I thought I'd pack it home, just to look at.

Wish there were notches filed in it, for scalps. Maybe some of these dents *are* notches! I'll bet it ought to be covered with notches!"

"Joe!" She shuddered again—what a bloodthirsty creature this husband of hers was! "Please throw it away!"

"Oh, no," he entreated. "You don't *really* mind, do you, Mary? I won't hurt anybody with it—I couldn't. I just like it because it's a regular old Western six-gun, with a history. I'll show it to the folks in Detroit and make up some kind of a yarn about it."

"You don't know how to shoot it, anyway," she asserted.

"Never did shoot one, of course; not a big revolver, like this. It weighs a ton! Awful long barrel, isn't it? I don't suppose I could hit anything with it, if I did shoot it; but I can't shoot it because it's no good. See—the trigger's gone, and it hasn't any sight, either. So there's no danger from it. I can't get the cartridges out—they're stuck fast with green rust; but I don't dare raise the hammer for fear I couldn't let it down again. So you needn't be afraid."

Then, fondling the relic, he boyishly romanced:

"It may be handy to have around, too. You see, we could scare anybody with it—anybody, that is, who didn't know that it wouldn't work!"

THE sun was blazing high when, the next morning, they picked up another wayfarer. The blissful cut-off that they had taken as an adventure trail had been all theirs, the flawless blue sky, the godlike sun and the clean, shimmering landscape of ruddy earth—striated ledges and beckoning horizons castellated with cedar and piñon ridges and azure turrets—theirs, for an Eden, until they overtook this ancient, who, like a monitor of inexorable Time, trudged under his burden along the road.

Because he was shrunken with age, lame, and bowed by his bed-roll, while they themselves were young and able and joyous and free of toil, the girl cried out. Whereupon they stopped and backed.

"Want a lift?" they hailed him.

He came shuffling on, in the dust.

"Why, thank ye—I'd call that kind! It's a hot road to the feet."

"It shore is," the boy replied, in his best Western vernacular. "Climb in. There's plenty of room. We'll take you on."

The old fellow stowed his bed-roll in, and followed it, and the little car was full. He was a gentle old man: his voice had been mild, his shallow blue eyes were mild, all the cast of his grizzled-stubbled, weathered countenance was mild and patient. They need have no misgivings over him.

His gnarled hands trembled while he fished a bandanna from his shabby clothes and thankfully mopped his forehead.

"Going far?" the boy asked, as the car trundled on.

"Jest to the Magdalena mine, 'crost the divide yonder."

"How far is that?"

"Thirty mile."

"Thirty miles! Were you going to walk all that way? Not today!" the girl exclaimed.

"Well, I didn't calkilate to make it today," he said. "It's quite a climb an' I haint got the wind I once had. I reckon to get there by tomorrow night. I heared," he passively imparted, "that they want a cook."

"But what would you do tonight?"

"Me? Oh, bed down where I happened to be, miss. Rustle a camp an' bed down. 'Twouldn't be the fust time. But there's a good campin' spot at an old ranch on the divide, with a livin' spring, an' nobody to bother ye. I aim to camp there an' travel on in the mornin'."

The boy seized on one word.

"Is this the road for the old ranch?"

"Yep. The top o' the divide is about twenty miles yet, but you'll find it a purty rough road."

"Does it go to the mine, too?"

"Not exac'ly to the mine. It forks below the mine, an' an ore trail, for freightin' in an' out, goes on up. You can see the mine, above ye, but I wouldn't advise anybody to tackle the trail up, unless they had bus'ness there."

"We can take you almost to it, anyway," said the girl.

"Yes, miss, if you're goin' that fur."

"Is the road worse than this?" she queried presently.

"What road would you mean, miss?"

"To that mine."

"Yes, ma'am. An' this road gets wuss further on, miss."

"We are Mr. and Mrs. Joseph K. Bowen," she informed with due pridefulness, "from Detroit, Michigan."

"I'm called Delaney," he simply said.

The road, rutted and rocky, grew worse.

The constant upgrade was moderate to the eye, but not so to the motor—not in this increasing altitude. What with boilings, and blow-outs and long grindings away in low gear it was well past noon when, after a succession of desperate spurts and resultant halts they arrived, dog-tired and sweat-streaked, the three of them, at the abandoned ranch upon the flat top of the Datil divide.

The onward trail?

"Well, I reckon 'taint much better," crooned the old man. "Purty good acrost this flat, but there's some rocky pitches on t'other side an' consider'ble sand between."

The next water?

"Thirty mile, except at the mine. They've flumed water in to it, out of a cañon; but the fust water you can get at is a pump an' tank at a Mexican ranch jest before you reach Salado."

"Gee!" the boy sighed. "Then let's camp here for the night, and cool off and rest up."

"Let's! I like it here," the girl cried out gladly. "There isn't any better place to camp, is there?"

"Nope," the old man said. "Nothin' with water, short o' thirty mile, an' if you had trouble you might not make that 'fore night."

It was indeed a pleasant spot. Peace-breathing friendliness ruled here; violence and danger seemed far off.

The flat bore stately silent pines, of warmly reddish bark and generously extended branches, and in shade and sun alike the light air was grateful with a resinous savor. The road through broke a level surface of brown needle-strewn sandy loam, itself comforting to the senses. In front of the ranch gateway an untraveled road, probably a woods road, grown to grass and low shrubs, made sally, at a broad angle, deeper into the timber.

THE ranch premises, skirted by the main road, were small and humble, but they offered sanctuary to the parched, the travel-worn, and the benighted. The poles of the wide entrance gate in the ragged rail fence had long been down. The squatty log shack, with its sagging sod roof, empty casements, and open doorway, had the benign aspect of silent hopeful waiting. The out-shed, slab-faced and tattered, with stable attached, was genial, like a beggar sunning. Flowering bushes nestled against the

crooked pole corral as if against a trellis. And piped in from a source amid the darkly rising ground in the rear of the buildings, to overflow a sunken barrel set beside the shack and in front of the shed, the water of a spring busily tinkled.

The reeking car was parked under a pine just inside the gate. Now, like veteran campaigners all, the wayfarers proceeded to unpack, to spread camp, wash, and devour a hasty snack as a sop toward the full evening meal; to rest a bit, then to be forehanded by regenerating the faithful steed so that it sung lustily again as warrant of readiness for tomorrow. And, finally everything being shipshape, in that interval while the shadows swiftly lengthened and fire and supper pended, to trot out that remarkable treasure, the relic six-gun.

The old man's eyes may have passed upon it before, where it lay atop the dunnage, carefully half displayed, but although he had been quite impressed, in mild and civil way, by the completeness of the camp equipage, he had placidly disregarded that chiefest article.

This was disappointing. The boy challenged:

"Here—ever see a gun like this before?"

The old man blinked.

"Reg'lar old six-shooter, aint it? Yep, reckon I have. They warn't so uncommon, one time."

"But this is a real old-timer! It belonged to Hassayampa Bill, and it's killed a lot of men. He was marshal or sheriff or something—a peace officer, you know, here in New Mexico—and they say he made peace, all right. When he went after a man he got him; had to or else they'd get him! This was the gun he did it with."

"It is, eh?"

"Yes. It was hanging up, out of the way, in an old 'dobe that used to be a saloon and stage-station, back on the trail. The leather of the belt and holster had all rotted brittle and weren't any good, but I gave the fellow who was keeping store there a dollar for the gun. Hassayampa wont ever come for it now." The boy laughed, with an apologetic note. "It aint much good, either; see?" he added, "No trigger and no sight, and I can't get the old cartridges out."

Impulsively he handed it over, for the old man was so plainly without guile; and besides the gun obviously was no good.



"It belonged to an old-timer named Hassayampa Bill. It's killed a lot of men—I bet some of these dents are notches!"

"It's loaded, though!" cried the girl. "Oh, do be careful!"

"Shucks, Mary!" the boy scoffed. "It wouldn't go off, even if you did try to fire it; not with those bum cartridges! And anyhow we don't dare raise the hammer, because we couldn't let it down again, without a trigger.

The heavy gun trembled slightly in the old man's fingers, as he tentatively inspected it—laying it in one calloused palm, the other hand closed about the scarred butt.

"Yep," he murmured, as if appraising, "jest so." He made diffident comment, while he slowly fingered it with a certain wondering hesitation. "The old forty-five—yep, that's it! I reckon—wouldn't you?—that trigger was taken out on purpose. Sometimes they did that, an' filed off the cockin' notches in the lock, an' worked the hammer with the thumb. Filed off the sight, too, like here, so it wouldn't ketch on anything in the draw. Well, 'taint no good now—been out o' commission a long time! Yep, a long time," he crooned. "Was a good gun once. What you want of it?"

"Why, I'm going to keep it for a relic. You see it was used by a regular gunman! Gee, I wish somebody'd shoot it! Can you show me?"

"Me?" The old man sat back as though frightened.

"Yes. Show me how to work it with the thumb, I mean."

"Nope." The tone was more positive. "Better let it be, I reckon, till you can get them ca'tridges out. Hammer's restin' over an empty chamber now, but the cylinder's purty free yet; ye might go to turnin' the cylinder an' snappin', an' have an accident. Dare say them ca'tridges are no account—et by verdigris that way—couldn't set 'em off nohow; but the bar'l's likely to be rusted, or the cylinder might stick a trifle out o' line, an' ye'd have a blow-up that'd put ye to the bad."

"Please put it away," the girl entreated.

"No, wait. I'd like to see it thumbed just once," urged the boy. "He can point it at the ground. I'll bet none of those cartridges will go off. Do you know how?" he asked, turning to the oldster.

"Me?"

"Sure."

"Want to see it thumbed, do ye?" A sudden fierce urge appeared to flame up in the old man—an urge quickening those faded eyes and that spare frame with action held so barely in leash, that the boy paled and the girl clenched her hands. Then, as if having fought it out with himself, the old man relaxed and said more gently:

"Nope. Better not. Best lay it away. You're right, miss. 'Taint for no other use, these days."

HE lingered over it, however, toying with it, and the two sat fearfully, knowing themselves to be dependent upon his capricious moods, here in this sequestered camp, now chilled with the first breath of evening.

Suddenly the suspense was punctured by a harsh command:

"As you are! Easy now! Don't move!"

A human rat—at least, humanly fashioned—who had been roused from the shed by their coming, had slunk through the bushes and trees and stolen inward again, to spy and listen.

Sufficiently emboldened, he ended his stalk, and now at his hail from close quarters, they looked aside up into the black muzzle of his vicious automatic pistol, and the equally vicious, cruel face behind it.

Triumphantly he leered down, his pistol hand steady, and his thin, sour lips drawn back from buck teeth which accentuated the sharp, ratty outline of his grimy visage.

"This picnic is busted," he said. "We're goin' to pair off, see? Get up, you two gents. On your feet—but careful! Drop that big gat, Grandpa. You two can beat it into the shack. You might ketch cold here." He licked his lips. "That there's my gal now. Her an' me are goin' to take a little joy-ride into the tall timber." And with a jerk of his head he appeared to indicate the car and the obscure woods-road. The deduction was all too apparent.

"Oh!" the girl gasped. The boy tried to speak, but the words were frozen in the horror that blanched his countenance and paralyzed his muscles. The old man Delaney slowly rose, on limbs that trembled, the ancient and useless revolver forgotten in his stiffly gripping fingers.

The rat's venomous pistol, poised like the head of a striking snake, followed him up.

"Drop that gat, or I'll plug yuh!"

The old man found quavering voice.

"You wouldn't shoot an old man, would ye?" He seemed in a very funk of trepidation, his faculties impotent with fear. "Not jest for a no-count gun?"

"I know all about the big gat, Grandpa. It's a has-been, like you be, but you're too old to pack a gun. I'm on a collectin' tower, myself. Drop it, I say, or else hand it over, 'fore you get hurt. My gal's waitin'."

The old man's lips quivered. His help-

lessness under that wicked little muzzle and those mocking retorts, was pitiable.

"You're purty hard on an old man who couldn't do ye any harm."

The rat cursed him, and took a step forward.

"Hand it over, butt first! That's the way I like 'em. Be a gent, old man. Lucky for you it aint a real gun or I'd have bored you. I'm not playin' chances. Pass it out, now, an' careful—or you'll get shot."

"W-well—" the old man faltered. "I'll give it to ye, but 'taint wuth nothin' an' we warn't doin' ye any harm."

Amid a stark silence that held the boy and the girl in a nightmarish spell, the fatuous dotard, with obedience almost craven, held out in his palsied grasp, the battered, useless gun, reversed 'butt forward.

Somehow the dusky air had suddenly become charged with unuttered menace. As if feeling it, the rat glanced right and left; then with his pistol spacing widely from his one hand he warily extended the other.

"Here they come! *Run!*" the old man cried suddenly and startlingly.

He had tensed and writhed aside, his movements marvelously quick. There was a glimpse of his face set fiercely and of the ruffian momentarily thrown off guard, of a gun twirled end for end, butt now in hand, thumb over hammer, the long barrel descending with lightning speed. A jerk—*click!* Another jerk—*click!* As rapidly as the *ticktock, ticktock* of a racing clock. Another jerk—*whang!* A cartridge had awakened. To the great belch of smoke and the thunderous report, the amazed rat vented a curious explosive grunt, and thrown back by the heavy ball fell to earth like a sodden leaf.

INSTANTLY the shackles of fear were broken. The girl and boy sprang up. Now they were aflame with reaction, and they shouted in relief. A vile beast had clutched at them—and a miracle had been granted to save them!

So they babbled—thanking, acclaiming, assuring; but the old man was crouched low, the smoking gun dropped, his face buried in his shaking hands, while over and over he repeated:

"I couldn't tell—he baited me to it—I had to try—I was givin' ye th' chance to run. Oh my, oh my, oh my!"

Vainly they tried to comfort him.

Then a horseman rode in upon them. With a searching and comprehensive glance around he dismounted, and they saw underneath his swinging vest a metal star.

"What's the trouble here?" he asked brusquely.

"Why, that—that—" The boy was at a loss for the term, and pointed. "He held us up with a pistol—he intended to take my—my wife—off with him, into the woods! And he was threatening old Mr.

I don't see anything wrong in all this." He tapped the crouched and whimpering figure upon the shoulder. "What's the matter with you, old-timer? They say you know a few tricks with a six-gun. Get up—I want to look at you."

"Told me to hand it to him! Hand my gun to him! Him, with his popper; me, with that one. Him—ag'in' me!"

"He didn't savvy," agreed the man with the star.

"Nope, he didn't savvy."



There was a glimpse of his face set fiercely, of a gun twirled. . . . To the thunderous report the amazed rat fell to earth.

Delaney, here—to get that revolver; and Mr. Delaney shot first—killed him, I hope. The gun hasn't any trigger, but he thumbed it at him! Offered it, butt end—for him to take it! Then before he could take it, threw him off his base by yelling at him—and flipped the gun over and thumbed it! Thumbed it three times at him before it went off or he got to shooting back! That fast! You ought to've seen! It's my gun; I paid a dollar for it because it belonged once to a regular gun-man—Hassayampa Bill," the boy explained. "I didn't think it would go off. None—none of us did," he concluded weakly.

"They sometimes do," the man with the star remarked. He strolled aside and with his foot turned the body of the erstwhile desperado a little more, the better to scan it. "Humph! That's the bird! Rather guessed he might be hiding out 'round here. But he wasn't wuth shoot-ing, unless—" He strolled back. "Well,

The old man wearily drew himself erect. He seemed to have grown gaunt and ashy, as if burnt out by the blaze of that brief vigor; but when he squared himself, grimly inviting inspection, he was seen to be of greater stature than had before been apparent.

The man with the star also straightened, pricked into cognizance.

"Hassayampa Bill! By Henry! How come? Turned up again, have you? Heard you were— It's surely been a long, long time since those days, when I was a pup. But I might have suspicioned." He laughed, with gesture toward the prone body. "Well, looks like you had to show him; he certainly was a fool! Another notch in the old gun, eh?"

"Him! A notch!" Old Hassayampa Bill's tone was tinged with a bitter solemnity. "I never killed a man in all my life. Peace officer—marshal an' sheriff—for twenty year. They knowed me. An' now—yep—I've had to kill a fool at last!"

Held for Release

This absorbing novelette of adventure in San Francisco's famous Barbary Coast brings forward our old friend Hiram Inkwell and his up-and-coming crew of newspaper men.



Illustrated by Paul Lehman

By JOSEPH BLETHEN

THE literary burglar had stood the town on its ear. He had become first-page stuff, and as elusive as he was popular. The police had frankly confessed having too much from him, and at the same time Constant Reader wrote, telephoned and called on the local press demanding more of him. To wake up in the morning to find your house combed or your safe cracked, and discover yourself the possessor of one of those flippant notes signed "*Barbary*," and left where you couldn't possibly miss it, became a mark of distinction. You achieved publicity—maybe for the first time in your life—and you knew that half the town was jealous of you.

Some people went so far as to make it easy for the flippant literary *Raffles* by leaving their doors unlocked when they went to the movies. And some of them got just what was coming to them: a visit from a prowler—but always from the wrong one. The literary cuss did not waste copy on unknown publishers. Witness the occasion when he lifted that pre-war champagne from the iron-barred basement above which lived a Senator of these

United States of Amendments, and left a note thanking said statesman for having carefully kept the bottles properly lying on their sides. And again when he swiped a saxophone from a famous orchestra leader's studio and left a note promising to kill it mercifully so that it should moan no more.

So the daily press uttered caustic jabs at the police, ridiculing the authorities over their inability to capture Mr. Barbary, popular underworld scribbler, and itself became the recipient of requests from many curbstone critics demanding that it get a hump on itself, locate the audacious author and obtain a good, juicy, secret interview. Every reporter in town was putting in extra hours spinning theories as to who was this depraved genius with a cultivated style—all save one. Karl Trotter, of the *Daily Outstander*, had endless debates with Captain Billetdoux, chief of detectives, as to *why* this effort to popularize this signature "*Barbary*." Why wear gloves to cover fingerprints, and then perfume your trail to tantalize the pursuing bluecoats? A story within a story, argued Karl. "Bet your

A sneer sprang to his lips. "Put 'em up? For you? Why, lady-fingers, you couldn't—"



life," agreed Captain Billy and added smilingly: "Why don't you ask the Colonel to turn you loose on the stunt?"

Another of the Inkwell outfit was also keenly interested—none other than the chief himself, Colonel Hiram Inkwell, editor, publisher and proprietor of the very prosperous *Daily and Sunday Outstander*. Through it all, old Hiram smiled in editorial content. The pursuit of the literary highwayman made great newspaper copy. And then—the literary lifter went so far as to invade the Colonel's own library, in the Colonel's own home, open the door of the Colonel's pet grandfather clock, stop the pendulum, and tie thereto a note jumping on old Hiram for his jabs at the police.

"Your attitude is unprofessional," read the note. "The longer I'm at liberty to ply my trade, the more copy your crazy reporters can turn in. Better clean your columns of a lot of bunk I read there every day before you condemn my occasional bulls to a hungry public.—Slim."

At first Hiram Inkwell thought this note was a joke, but Karl Trotter insisted that the backhand slant of the pen was exactly like Barbary's former efforts, now treasured in Captain Billy's safe at headquarters. And the Colonel admitted that the comedy in the composition left but little doubt as to authorship.

"But why the new signature?" asked the Colonel.

"Captain Billy says 'Slim' is a slip," answered Trotter. "I think it was deliberate. Now we have 'Barbary Slim' to work on, and that's another thing altogether."

"Well," answered old Hiram, "I'll be darn sorry if his personal visit to my library should result in his capture. I confess I like the cuss."

As Trotter said, heretofore each and every literary gem had been signed "*Barbary*," but as there were two or three real crooks and a flood of amateur pool-hall desperados who loved to tack "*Barbary*" to their names, the police had combed the

Coast in vain, only to pile up a large assortment of alibis. But now, taking one consideration with another, the police had "Barbary Slim" to work on, and they promptly pinched the only Barbary Slim they knew, one Tim Maloney, ex-piano puncher from Sam Ruppy's dance-hall, but who had once been pinched for passing counterfeit bills and elected to spend a long visit at one of Uncle Sam's all-year-round resorts. On being pardoned on that charge, Tim had returned, seeking to pound pianos along the Coast, but being turned down, had found work along the smelly reaches of The Embarcadero.

Now the police breathed easier, but the dear readers were downcast. So Bill Cuts, the city editor, shot his police reporter Karl Trotter to the jail-house for an interview with the literary crook. But right there Trotter found his subtleties as ineffectual as were the various degrees of pressure applied by the police. Tim Maloney remained a stolid piano-puncher, his illiterate denials vamping monotonously in a very minor key. Cuts roared his impatience at the reporter, and Trotter indignantly roared back an invitation for the city editor to go to jail and try piano-tuning for himself. "And on top of that," declared Trotter, "I don't believe this bird ever wrote those notes. He's nothing but a musician, and a bum one at that. He can't even write words to his own jazz, let alone take that wallop at Colonel Inkwell."

"Maybe he's a good actor," urged Cuts. "He's stalling the police. You stick around. Maybe you can wear him down."

The only admission the police could get from Tim Maloney was that he had been known as Barbary Slim and that he had been arrested and had served time on the charge of passing counterfeit money, and had been pardoned. Beyond that he maintained his stolid front of denials. The police admitted that he was a puzzle, but declared that sooner or later they would break him.

It was on the fourth evening of his incarceration that Trotter dropped in for a quiet chat. They sat on Tim's cot in a smelly cell and reminisced. Gradually Trotter became convinced that Tim had something on his chest, and then, by virtue of pleading Colonel Inkwell's well-known interest in humanity, he persuaded Tim to tilt the lid, and permit a friendly glance at its secret contents. The result

was that an excited police reporter spent a sleepless night, and early next afternoon parked himself at the city editor's desk prepared to weather everything in Cuts' wide repertory from subtle ridicule to open wrath.

"Boss," he began, when Cuts had arrived for duty, "I've a new line on the classical crook story. I've a hot lead. I want you to put some one else on police for a few days and turn me loose on my hunch."

"Sure," answered Cuts with a grin. "Now that the crook is caged, you want a few evenings off to recapture him. What's on your mind? New poker game opened somewhere?"

"Look here," persisted Trotter indignantly, "ever since Tress Frisby played his hunch in that Wally Sands case, you've starved him. Now, I come in with a—"

"Different!" snapped Cuts, to whom the Wally Sands episode was a painful memory. "Tress has been trained to go out and dig up news. You're a police reporter. Fires, murders, robberies, suicides and such are handed to you ready baked. Even then you take the word of the police for everything. Don't forget that you ragged Tress like hell too, and repeat, for his hunch in the Sands case."

"I did," admitted Trotter, "but that was snap judgment. I've lain awake all night over this. I don't believe this Tim Maloney is the letter-writing burglar. Not at all. I've a hunch as to who it is, and I want to round him up. Great story! For the love of Mike, give me a chance!"

"I'll give you a day off," answered the city editor decisively. "You're worn out. This Barbary Slim person has you worried. Go sit in the park. Listen to the birdies. There's nothing worrying *them*. Then come in here tomorrow noon and look me in the eye. I'll bet you a drink you won't have the nerve to open your yap about any hunch."

"You're on," declared Trotter eagerly. "I'll win that drink and I'll bring you a *plan*."

BUT the police reporter did not go to watch the snails break speed-laws in the park. He spent the afternoon playing pinochle in Tim Maloney's cell, and after a quiet dinner in a Coast cabaret along with a famous sure-thing man, by name Feather McGlinn, he sprawled in a chair in the office of Captain Billetdoux,

and had a difficult hour getting his monologue over. Then he went home early, slept late, and primed to back the crusty Cuts off the reservation, again parked himself belligerently at the city desk.

"Well, how's the blithering idiot this morning?" said Cuts, by way of a fraternal greeting. "Did you have sense enough left to bring me that drink? I'll hold it for release at dinner time."

"You lose," replied Trotter, nerving himself for action. "I've developed my plan. And believe me, boss, she's a whiz bang."

"Oh, my Lord!" exclaimed the city editor. "More drivell! There goes my whole day. Utterly ruined."

"Wait till you hear it," urged Trotter. "You'll die."

"I'd rather die first," answered Cuts facetiously. "Pin it to a bunch of flowers. I won't be there to read it."

"I'll tell you this much," exclaimed Trotter, leaning forward and cracking the desk with his fist. "I want Colonel Inkweller to lend me one thousand dollars in gold to bail out Tim Maloney. I need Tim in my plan to nab the real literary burglar."

The city editor stared at the reporter. "Ask the Colonel to go bail for a *crook*? Say, now I *know* you're crazy."

"Sure," agreed Trotter, entirely unabashed; "crazy as a mint julep at a Baptist picnic. I ask your permission right now to lay my plan before the Colonel."

The very daring of the suggestion had brought Cuts to attention. "Don't I get to hear it?" he barked.

"You'll miss something if you do not! Both you and the M. E. Say, boss, I'm not trying to go over your head. I'm only trying to save you trouble."

"You've got me in way over my depth, anyhow," answered Cuts, unbending slightly. "Tell you what you do: You watch the old man's door till he comes in, and then you arrange the convention. If he doesn't chuck you out on your bean, I'll take a ringside seat."

"Thanks," exclaimed Trotter, a momentary triumph shining in his eyes. Then he raced across the local room to his desk, peeling his coat as he went. He squared away at his typewriter and began pounding out copy. An hour later Cuts poked him in the back. "What the hell, Trot," he queried: "writing a book?"

"First part of my scoop," answered

Trotter, without looking up. "You'll hold it for release."

"I'll hold it for evidence of your insanity," answered the city editor. "I just wanted to tell you that the old man's been here for half an hour."

It was a rule of the shop that any employee with business on his mind and nerve in his heart could enter Colonel Inkweller's sanctum unannounced. Coatless, the police reporter hurried eagerly to the den. Cuts, smiling indulgently, returned to his desk to await results.

The low growl of Hiram Inkweller's booming voice came distinctly through the clatter of the local room. "Hello, Trot," Cuts heard it say. "What excuse have you for living now that your pet crook is locked up?"

What Trotter said in answer was not audible. Nor did the old man chuck him out. Instead, the conference growled along as serenely as a distant thunder shower on a summer's evening—growled along until finally the Colonel's buzzer snarled, bringing to sudden life the copyboys sprawled on the long bench. Number One boy raced to the sanctum door.

"Boy," boomed old Hiram, pleasantly, "send Screech and Cuts in here."

"My God," thought Cuts, jumping up, "if Trot has put it over, I'll kill him!"

THE three men, gathered about the big flat-top, waited in respectful silence for the Chief to state the case before the bar. They knew in advance that it would be a typical Inkweller conference. The old man would ask their opinions, deliver a picturesque monologue, and then do as he darned pleased. But the monologues came under the head of impromptu vaudeville, to which admission was priceless.

When he was ready to begin, old Hiram observed the sequence of authority in the organization. He addressed Mr. Screech, the managing editor. "Bill," said he, "have you heard the crazy scheme our chief police sleuth has on his mind?"

"No, Colonel. But I heard Cuts roasting him. I thought there must be something rotten in Denmark."

"And you, Cuts?" queried the chief.

"I passed him on to you, sir," answered the city editor. "I do not know all of his plan, but when he said he wanted you go bail for this letter-writing burglar, I gave up. You have had more experience with the insane, sir."

"You disapprove, then?"

"On the face of it, yes sir."

"Just why?"

"Because, if this bird is *the* burglar, we would be taking long chances. He might skip out and forfeit your thousand dollars, or he might pull another stunt that would turn a big laugh on us. If he is *the* man, he is nobody's fool. Karl hasn't let me into his reasons for thinking he's *not* the crook."

"But suppose he isn't," urged Colonel Inkwell, "and suppose he works with Trotter to catch the right rabbit. Some scoop for the *Outlander*, what?"

"Too big an *if*," answered the city editor. "If this Tim Maloney, known for years on Barbary Coast as 'Barbary Slim'—named so because of his long, slender musician's fingers—is a victim of a criminal trick, then the real criminal is a very wise bird. He will take flight on Tim's release, fearing revenge. Or he will take fright at the mysterious friend who liberates Tim, and lay very low. Tim will come to trial, and the police will pile up evidence. I think it would be wiser to wait a few days, see what develops, and let Trotter's enthusiasm cool off a bit. No one else is going to bail the man out. He will stay right in jail for some time to come. Too many chances right now."

FOR a moment Colonel Inkwell sat silent, lost in dreamy retrospection.

"Chances, yes," he said finally. "But once in a while I like to take a chance. I took one when I started a newspaper on the northern coast, one year before the Klondike discovery. I am credited in some quarters with having foreseen that golden event. Well, if I did, I was a fool to let old man Carmac go in there and cop off the gold and the glory while I sat at home and played the Klikitat at the Water Gate. I took another chance when I moved here and bought this sheet. And another when I hocked my shirt to buy those tide-lands down beyond Hunter's Point. Those three chances added up have landed me in the hated tribe of plutocrats, whereby I'm roundly cussed by *hoi-pol-loi*, and closely watched by the Federal income sharks. At the time I took them, they looked like long chances—much longer chances than I'll be taking now if I produce this Trotterized comedy of crooks. Maybe I'm hard-boiled, but I'll say I like Trotter's nerve."

The police reporter smothered an impulse to approve the Chief's gambling spirit, Mr. Screech smiled contentedly, and Bill Cuts slumped a bit farther in his chair. On the face of things, Trotter would gallop in a winner.

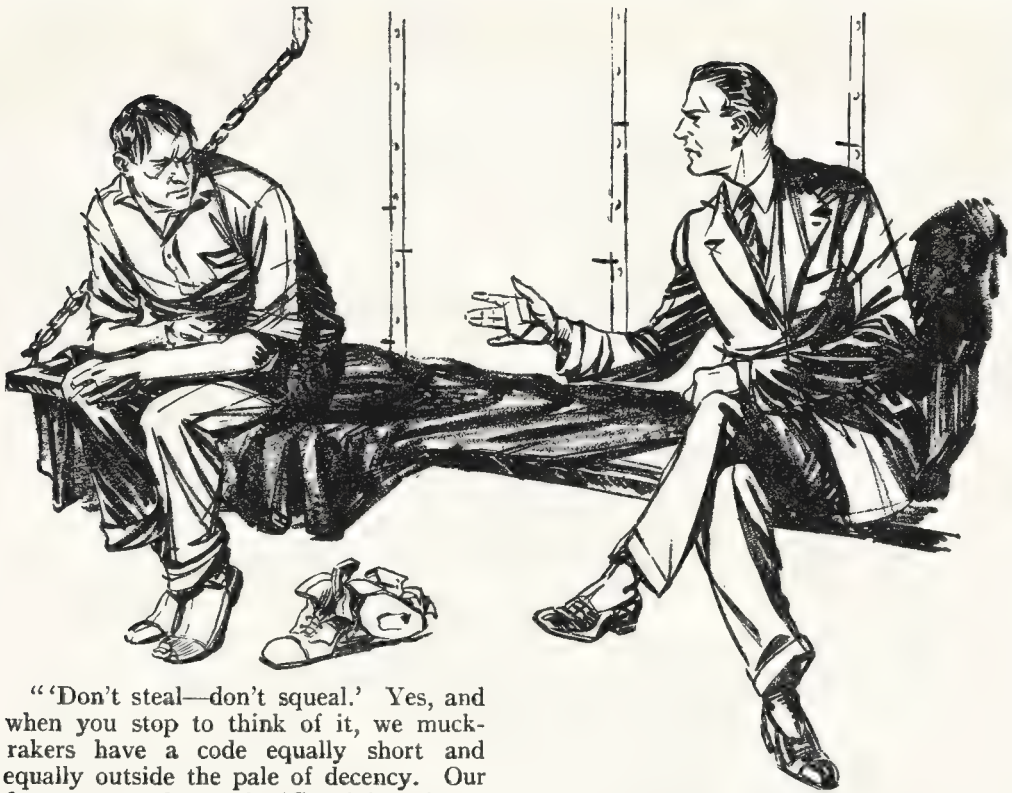
"To me," continued old Hiram, "the crook, as an institution, is darn interesting. I'd rather read one snappy detective-story than a whole Sunday supplement full of stuff about the great uplift and padded out with guff on civic progress. Wherefore, it is easier for a police reporter to get at my private check-book than it is for a long-haired reformer to get my sympathetic ear."

Hiram settled back in his chair, pulled off his glasses, and slid them out on the desk. His audience knew the monologue was due, and waited.

"When you walk all around a real crook," continued Hiram Inkwell, "and get his perspective on life, you will find him as deadly as a jungle tiger and equally sleek. But in his own sphere he has a code and lives up to it. Being a real crook is more than a business; it's a religion. And there are just two commandments in his creed: 'Don't steal,' and 'Don't squeal.' It's a simple code, but they prosper under it. In spite of the sneers of society, and the activities of the police, the crook as an institution worries along a darn sight happier under his two commandments than we high-brows do under ten with a Constitution, seventeen bylaws and one dry-law on top of that.

"Look at it from the crook's point of view for a minute. When he says 'Don't steal,' he means don't steal from *him*. He is talking about his own little principality in the underworld. We who live on the top crust are fair game. We were created to become his meal-ticket. The more prosperous we get, the better automobile he can use for holding up bank messengers.

"But his second commandment is the germ of his creed. It takes nerve not to squeal when you are hurt. Talk about moral courage! Say, the bird who faces fifteen years in the pen and keeps his mouth shut as to his partners in crime has the old martyrs beat a mile. They died enthused over a principle, and cheered by the plaudits of the faithful. He faces hell in solitude, and on top of that he has to smile on the maudlin reformers till his enforced vacation is over."



"‘Don’t steal—don’t squeal.’ Yes, and when you stop to think of it, we muck-rakers have a code equally short and equally outside the pale of decency. Our first commandment is ‘Get it,’ and our second is ‘Print it.’ Under the head of ‘Get it,’ we act just like the crook. We rob the world of its privacy and add insult to injury by cartooning the world’s dearest hobbies.

"Now, when it comes to the case in hand, Trotter has intrigued me by holding out the name of the crook he suspects of being the real author of our famous burglar letters, and of being the guy who took that wallop at me in my own library. Stopping my pet clock like that to get my attention was subtle comedy—very! I’m dying to meet the fellow. And by holding his name for later release, Trotter is playing fair with his pals down on the Barbary Coast. If this theory proves correct, he’ll wind up the career of an unethical crook, and restore a downtrodden piano-player to concert pitch. If this hunch proves false, I may lose a thousand dollars bail-money, but Trot retains his standing in the jailbreakers’ union."

CUTS squirmed in his chair. "He is putting his friendship for the crook ahead of his duty to you, Colonel," he declared. "Asking you for a thousand dollars is plain nerve. But refusing to come clean is insubordination."

"Maybe it is," answered Hiram Ink-

Trotter, convinced that Tim had something on his chest, persuaded Tim to tilt the lid and permit a friendly glance at its contents.

weller, "and maybe it's just good ethics. A police reporter must protect his stock-in-trade. He must respect his sources of information. It's all right for us to make Trotter turn in his flashes on murders, robberies and such—and of course bootleggers are always fair game. They anticipate arrest and assess their anticipated fines against their customers. But when you ask Trotter to give away one of his regular pals who happens to be in the safe-cracking line, that's another thing. Trotter gets a lot of tips from the regular crooks that lead to good copy after the safe has been cracked. But once let him spill some inside stuff in advance of delivery, and his acquaintance with the sure-thing men would evaporate. We don't ask our Washington correspondent to unload all he knows about the plans of the President with reference to tax-reduction; nor does he waste telegraph tolls speculating on Supreme Court decisions. He writes 'em out with a release date on the top left-hand corner and sends 'em on to us by regular post. He doesn't even waste extra stamps to support the new riders of the air.

"In this case, Trotter's story is a long way from being ripe, and long before it matures, it may turn out just plain rotten. But there's one angle to it I like. It's a slant that takes me into the inner psychology of the crook. Observe, if you please, that this scribbling burglar has reaped a tremendous flood of notoriety. Therein he is unethical. He has introduced vaudeville into crime. He has brought too much outside attention on the safe-crackers' union; and on the inside he has invited jealousy. He has bent his license plate just a little bit; and while his action doesn't justify a fellow-member squealing on him, it will surely prompt some unfriendly remarks. It's on that slant I'd like to see Trotter go to work. He can very soon, I believe, prove the identity of the literary burglar. Maybe he knows, right now. But he must make some one else tell him so that *he* doesn't get into the position of a squealer. It's complicated, and it's enticing. Anyway, I'm going to gamble on it. You hold Trotter's unfinished story for release, and turn him loose to create the last chapter.

"And you, Trot," concluded the old man, smilingly, leaning forward on his desk. "Remember that this puts you and me on trial. If we win, it's another dividend in good will for the *Outstander*. If we lose, the staff heads will be asking for our resignations."

"I'll remember, sir," answered the excited reporter, as he followed his city editor outside.

"You make me sick," growled Cuts, as they crossed the newsroom. "Getting the old man all enthused over a damn' underworld pipe-dream. If you lose he'll raise hell with us every day for a month."

"If I lose," declared Trotter, "you can pile it all on me. I know my onions, and I'm betting on them. I'll pin my resignation to my story. You'll have to print one or the other. See?"

"I'll hold *that* for release with pleasure," snapped the city editor, flouncing down at his desk.

TROTTER, a happy adventurer, resumed work on the advance copy of his dream. When he laid it on the city editor's desk, it read:

(*Trotter—Hold for release.*)

"Many stories have flashed out of the dark regions of Barbary Coast to stir the interest of the orderly dwellers on the San

Francisco hills, but no more enticing story has ever gripped this city than the trail of the so-called literary burglar. From his first daring enterprise to his final capture last night, his story reads like an adventure from the Arabian Nights. And as if to prove the old saying that 'he who digs a grave for his enemy may live to fall into it himself,' so the attempt of (name to come), the real author-crook, to throw his guilt on Tim Maloney, the inoffensive 'Barbary Slim' of the underworld dance-halls, led slowly but surely to his undoing.

"The story begins five years ago in Sam Ruppy's place on Barbary Coast. We find two young people performing in Ruppy's cabaret. The scene, despite its setting in the glitter of Barbary, is really a domestic one.

"The young people are Timothy Maloney, pianist, and Nellie O'Farrell, dancer. They are planning to be married, and many are the good wishes whispered to them at the busy bar, and waved from the tumultuous dance floor. But the course of romance does not run any more smoothly on the hidden Coast than it does up on the Hills of Fashion. Musicians are but paid mercenaries, serving in the open edges. They are not 'on the inside.' Boss gamblers, safe-crackers, and 'fixers' are the powers behind the bars, and the dictators of dance-floor etiquette. And for a boss gambler to relieve a musician of his sweetheart is no more than for a second-story man to rob a banker's wife of her jewels. So when (name to come) coveted Nellie O'Farrell, it was expected of him that he would go take her. Your crook may take what he can get, inside the Coast or outside, providing he does not take his fellow crook's bundle, boodle or booze.

"But Tim Maloney, being Irish and in love, preferred the fundamental rights of mankind to the secret ethics of the underworld. He told (name to come) to keep his distance. Thereupon a whispered word from the boss gambler to the owner of the dance-hall brought Tim's dismissal. (Name to come) then sought to brand the unprotected Nellie as his moll, but Nellie fled to Tim for protection. Tim sought out (name to come) and publicly thrashed him, thereby winning the secret respect of many denizens of the dance-halls, but also thereby closing firmly the doors of employment therein to himself and to his bride-to-be.

"Tim, the musician, found work along the Embarcadero, and Nellie, the dancer, returned to the laundry. Braving the disappointment of their banishment from the Coast, they defied Fate, and set the date for their wedding.

"(Name to come) heard this from his spies, and decided that his honor was at stake. It was known that he wanted Nellie O'Farrell. The Coast was grinning at him. He must act! He decided on removing Tim Maloney from the scene, thereby leaving Nellie helpless and unprotected.

"Going to Sam Ruppy, this same (name to come) pretended forgiveness of the musician's lack of manners. Tim, being in love, had lost his head and beat up a boss gambler. Well, let it pass. (Name to come) could be generous. He suggested that a purse be made up for the two and be presented to them as a wedding gift. He, (name to come), would blow a hundred. Ruppy—whether unsuspecting or obeying orders—fathered the plan, passed the hat and handed a full purse to Tim, with an invitation to return to his piano.

"Then the blow fell. Tim, paying the wedding expenses from the purse, was unaware that it contained a few counterfeit ten-dollar bills. He was dragged from the arms of his bride, tried and sent to prison. Nellie O'Farrell Maloney—a bride without a husband—shrank from (name to come's) pretended sympathy, trembled at the whispers she heard all about her, and too heart-broken to dance, fled to the isolated monotony of her electric mangle.

"**N**OW, with a free hand, the boss gambler laid his plans to beat Nellie Maloney into submission. He hounded her in her sorrow, tantalized her with his easy money, tortured her with threats on Tim's life. The distracted Nellie, crushed in her sorrow, and terrorized in her helplessness, attempted flight, only to be kidnapped by (name to come's) gang, and delivered secretly to (name to come's) hideous den in the underworld. There Nellie, fighting to the last, killed herself.

"To the world it was just another unfortunate sunk into oblivion. To the Coast it was a gasp to be whispered only in corners. (Name to come) had been beaten by a girl. And while (name to come) laughed over it and bragged over it as an adventure, there were those on the Coast who sent word to the man behind

prison walls, that he might know of their disapproval and their sympathy.

"On that day Tim Maloney turned from a hopeful man eager to make a good record, and sure that he would live to prove his innocence, to a desperate, hunted and haunted creature dragging out his days in prison with but one thought—to live out his term and then seek out and strangle (name to come) with his hungry hands.

"But the tragedy was too much even for the hardened hearts of Barbary Coast. There were crooks there who frowned on wanton destruction. There were killers who would croak a man for a price, but would not even be rude to a woman. Thus it happened that when the United States Secret Service seized a group of counterfeiters—the makers of Tim Maloney's unfortunate ten dollar bills—the convicted men told enough to bring about Tim's release from prison. They would not tell who had planted those tens in Tim's wedding purse. They would not tell where the counterfeit plates might be found. Squealing was not a part of their religion. But they told enough to clear Tim, and sent a subtle message to (name to come) which hurried that egotistical crook pell-mell into hiding.

"Tim Maloney, back on the Embarcadero, was watched two ways. The police watched to see if Barbary Slim, ex-convict, would go straight; friends of (name to come) watched to see of what metal this Irish lad was made. And because both the hunters and the hunted read that grim look in Slim's eyes, a very much alarmed boss gambler took thought for his safety.

"(Name to come) dare not openly defy the ex-convict, nor hire gunmen to bump him off. The Secret Service would need only that to nab him for planting those tens. That same Secret Service has a long memory, and an uncanny talent for the adding of one thing to another and getting a disturbing answer.

"So (name to come) descended to subterfuge. He became the Literary Burglar—but in another man's name. He robbed a store in the night and left a note signed Barbary. Step by step he built up public curiosity in the now famous letters, at first keeping to a style that might be that of a despised piano-player. Step by step he planned a web of circumstantial evidence that should enmesh Tim Maloney—the 'Barbary Slim' of the Embarcadero—and land him again behind prison bars.

"A sweet chapter in the life of a crook! Weaving a web for the destruction of an enemy, taking spoils as he went about his work, and creating an adventure that flared in the public prints, and that made him famous in the shady places of the underworld. But that very fame goes to his head. Now, (name to come) goes too far. He gets 'out of his character,' as the actors say. To get another roar of applause from the hungry public, he forgets that he is playing a piano, and gets clever. He becomes witty—far too witty for a dub of a dance-hall drone.

"Then suddenly he hears grumblings of discontent. His fame is bringing too close a scrutiny on the enterprises of the gentry. The underworld hints that it's time for him to quit play-acting, time to dispose of his enemy, and settle down to the orthodox methods of his trade. So he pulls a final, flashy stunt, and leaves a note signed Slim. 'Barbary' and 'Slim' become 'Barbary Slim,' and the police start afresh. They rush to the Embarcadero, find Tim Maloney droning out jazz in a back room, recognize him as Barbary Slim, an ex-convict, and jail him.

"The literary burglar is caught at last! The police breathe easy, and down on the Coast (name to come) gives a feast to his laughing pals.

"So far, so good. But all was not perfection. The real literary burglar had shut off his self-invented avenue to fame. No more facetious notes could be left on second-story bureaus, no more innuendoes left on Senators' dining-tables. If Tim Maloney was the literary burglar, then the author of the Barbary Slim notes was locked up, and his literary output confined to the amusement of his jailors.

"Another thing bothered (name to come). He had builded a fame for the literary burglar that threatened to topple of its own weight. The press, robbed of a live supply of sensational stories, was analyzing Barbary Slim and finding him most un-literary. Furthermore, why had Tim Maloney, sworn to avenge his persecuted bride, turned comedy burglar and loafed on his job of retribution?

"On analysis, motive pointed to (name to come). At this point the *Outlander*, always eager to see fair play, took a hand.

"Tim Maloney, out of jail, would become a thorn in the flesh to (name to come), and (name to come) would again take steps for his own safety. So the *Out-*

stander deposited bail for Tim Maloney, dangled the despised Barbary Slim under (name to come's) eyes, and set such a watch on that gent's movements as no boss gambler of the Coast had ever known.

"Inevitably, the expected happened. (Name to come) must get rid of Tim Maloney. So he planned another note, and planned to kidnap Tim and lay him where he would be caught red-handed.

"The last chapter is a thriller, a fit closing to the adventure of the true literary bandit. His capture was effected by the police at one-thirty this morning.

"(Turn rule. More to come.)"

TROTTER arranged the sheets of his advance story in a neat pile, and fastened them with a clamp. Then he wrote his resignation, and, placing it on top of the heap, laid the documents on Cuts' desk.

"Glad you put your resignation first," growled the city editor. "Bet you a bottle *that's* the thing I'll release."

"Make it two," snapped Trotter, and raced downstairs to keep his appointment with the cashier. . . .

Captain Billetdoux, chief of detectives, possessed two characteristics which went a long way toward sweetening his thankless profession of man-hunting. He had a sense of humor that softened his grim physical strength, and he had a love for the unofficial sleuths of the press that lead to many snappy double-plays.

It was a smiling and mysterious captain of detectives who, in full uniform, walked into the office of the desk-sergeant, and plunked down a small but heavy canvas bag on the blotter.

"Jewels—or poker chips?" asked the desk-man pleasantly.

"Few people play poker any more with toys like those," answered Captain Billy. "Mostly they use chicken feed. Take a look at 'em."

The desk-sergeant, with mild curiosity, broke the seal, and opened the canvas sack. His expression changed to one of keen interest. "*Twenties!*" he exclaimed.

"Fifty of 'em," said Captain Billy. "And those same pretty boys constitute the thousand dollars bail-money for one of your star boarders."

"Who *you* bailin' out?" demanded the desk-man in evident surprise. Three other blue-coated policemen laid down their sporting sheets and sauntered to the desk.

"When you're ready to write the re-

ceipt, I'll tell you. First off, you count this coin."

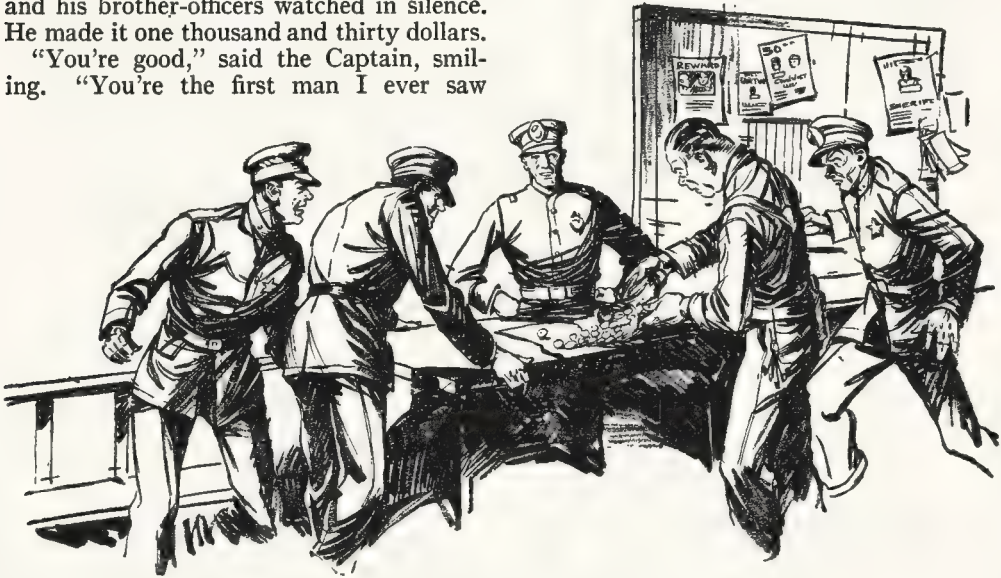
The desk-sergeant poured the fifty shining twenties on his desk. He was not accustomed to counting bail-money in such golden heaps. Currency, or an approved bond, would have failed to raise an eyelash. But the golden flood fussed him.

He drew the pile of gold coins toward him and started counting one at a time: "Twenty—forty—sixty—" Captain Billy and his brother-officers watched in silence. He made it one thousand and thirty dollars.

"You're good," said the Captain, smiling. "You're the first man I ever saw

"The bird that counted that out to me, counted it three times and then sealed it," replied the big detective evasively. "I watched him. Bet you my star against a dollar it's an even thousand."

The desk-sergeant counted the coins again, the three blue-coated onlookers hanging over him. This time the answer was correct. Then he surrendered his



"Twenties!" he exclaimed. "Fifty of 'em," said Captain Billy.
"Bail-money for one of your star boarders."

who could make a lot of twenties add up fifty-one *twenties* and one *ten*. What was your game before you came in here?"

On the second count the desk-sergeant made it nine hundred and eighty. He was quite sure he was right. Captain Billy bubbled. "Want to search me, Sergeant? Think I pinched off one of 'em?"

"Well, who the hell counted it, anyhow?" demanded the desk-man, mopping his moist brow.

"First off, some bird out at the Mint. Then some bank teller, and then—"

"I mean, who's putting up this kale?"

"Well," replied the captain of detectives, "you can make the receipt out in my name. Then, if you want to know any more, you call up the *Outstander's* information bureau. Maybe they'll tell you. Maybe they don't know."

"Old Inkwell?" demanded the desk-man eagerly. The three loitering bluecoats eyed Captain Billy with sudden interest.

chair to a brother-officer who caressed the stacks gently, wrecked them, restacked them, recounted them, and then voted with the majority. The desk-sergeant, much relieved, returned the coins to the canvas sack, tied it securely, sealed it and reached for his block of receipts.

"Who's this bail for?" he asked, with assumed indifference.

"Your letter-writin' friend," answered the chief of detectives. "Barbary Slim."

The desk-sergeant's pen stood still. He whistled softly. "Old Hiram bailin' out the literary crook?" he gasped. "What the hell's the play?"

"When I know, I'll tell you," answered Captain Billy. "Just now all I know is, this Barbary Slim guy's to be turned loose."

"Do I parole him to you?"

"Parole nothing. He gets the air."

The desk-sergeant ground his teeth. "Cap," said he, with thinly veiled sarcasm,

"if I had half your stand-in with that *Outstander* bunch, I'd quit the police and hit old Hiram for a job."

A MYSTIFIED and quite overwhelmed Tim Maloney stood before the desk-sergeant. Dimly he heard that officer speaking. "You get the air, boy. But be damn' careful what you do with it. We'll be watching you. Your stall that you don't know who bailed you don't go with the police."

Six reporters pounced on him, including the relief man from the *Outstander*. They found him a confused and forlorn pianoplayer, a man seemingly much afraid of his liberty. He was far from being the Barbary Slim that these very reporters had created in the public mind.

"You'll go back to the docks and pound pianos?" asked one of them.

"I don't know," answered Barbary Slim, and slunk away, this harmless dance-hall drone—afraid of his liberty.

And it had been beaten into him, this fear. Beginning with the shock of his arrest for passing those mysterious bills, his hopeless pleading of innocence, the tears of his bride—and then prison. He had been shocked as cruelly as a green trooper in his first gory trench. Then the desolation of iron bars, the tragedy of his bride's self-destruction, his delirium of hate, his blind rage for retribution.

His pardon had found him numbed, worn out. He returned to the cheap saloons of the Embarcadero to mope over out-of-time keyboards in soggy barrooms. In secret he dreamed revenge on Big Moulini, but before men he skulked in shadows.

A plain-clothes man followed him to his dreary room and searched it, just to keep him tame. Big Moulini sent him a bottle of poison, with a hideous invitation to drink to the health of his dead wife.

And then his rearrest on the preposterous charge of writing those crook letters. Again bars. Again utter desolation. Then—Karl Trotter!

As he slunk away from the police station, a suspected crook out on bail, his one desire to find this new friend, yet afraid to search for him. He headed for Little Italy. He hoped that a certain lodging-house man would let him have his old room again, and his clothes, and trust him till he could get a job. Work, any kind of work, a long way from the water-

rats, the red-light gentry and the plain-clothes men. He wanted to hide.

He was without money, his last wages having gone for cigarettes while in jail. He was without cigarettes, his last donations from Trotter having gone up in smoke in his lonesome cell. And where was that same Trotter? He had missed him, there by the desk-sergeant's blotter—had missed him, but had kept his mouth shut. Dimly he associated Trotter with his release from jail. But one thousand dollars? Reporters don't—

He yearned to smoke. He shuffled along wearily, fearful to look humanity in the face. As he turned to climb the stairs of his dingy rooming-house, he bumped into a man loitering in the entrance.

"Don't go up yet, kid," said Trotter's voice warningly. "Got a cigarette?"

"I'm out," answered Tim Maloney, coming suddenly to life. "Want to ask you something, Mr.—"

"Don't talk," snapped the reporter. "Take this package of cigarettes. Sit down on these steps behind me and smoke one of 'em. Don't look at me, and don't speak to me. Just read."

A chill silenced poor Barbary. With the numb obedience of the jailbird, he sank on the lowest stair of the dim hallway, and with shaking fingers, fumbled at the package the reporter had thrust at him.

It was a broken one, with the opened end folded carefully back. Tim fumbled the end open again, and fumbled for a cigarette. His fingers found not the coveted pill, but a small roll of paper. Still in a fog he drew it out and unrolled it.

Pinned to the paper was currency. Eagerly he counted it—four five-dollar bills. He was about to disobey and voice his thanks when his eye caught typewritten words on the small sheet. In the dim light he read it with difficulty:

Do not take a room here. Go up, pay what you owe and get your clothes. Dress up neat, and keep your mouth shut. Take a car out to Fillmore and get a cheap room near Bush. Pay for one week. Then come to the Rivoli Bar, right on the corner. I'll wait in the little room at the back.

The note was not signed. Looking up at Trotter's back, Tim Maloney saw that silent worthy calmly viewing the squalor of the cheap street. Trotter's left hand was behind his back. In the fingers were a few unlighted cigarettes, and the cigarettes were moving in a small circle. In

silence Tim Maloney took them; then he tramped rapidly up the stairs.

Trotter—and now the Fillmore district! Barbary Slim was suddenly a man less afraid of his liberty.

IT was a cautious and curious pianoplayer who slid into the little room at the back of the Rivoli Bar. He had taken off the laborer's clothing in which he had been arrested, and in which he had been liberated, and put on the snappy blue suit that had been his wedding dress and his musician's garb.

"That's the boy," greeted the waiting reporter. "Tonight you slap Big Moulini in the face with your sudden prosperity."

"Yes, Mr. Trotter," replied Tim, still mystified. "But first I want to ask you—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Trotter. "First, we eat. Then I talk." He pressed a button. "Two pints of Pilsener, eight dollars' worth of wieners, and rye bread," he said to the waiter. Then, leaning close to Tim, he whispered: "When that stuff comes, you *eat*, see? You're a saphead in from the orchards. I'm the wise guy throwing the bull. Get me? You *eat*!"

"I will," answered the man on bail, in mystified obedience.

Trotter watched him eat, and ate with him. He saw with relief that Tim's nerve was returning with his appetite. "Good Pilsener here," observed the reporter, when he was ready. "I know the boss. Good place to hide when I'm chasing a story."

Tim's eyes brightened in evident relief. "Can I ask it now?" he queried, meekly.

"You don't have to, boy. I bailed you out. Till further orders I'll feed you, sleep you and *watch* you. But you will take *orders*."

"You?"

"And while the police will watch too, they won't be rough. Captain Billy will do some whispering around that you are his little playmate."

"Yes sir. But how—"

"I borrowed it, Tim. And if you don't help me hang those Barbary letters on Big Moulini, I'll lose my job."

Tim Maloney's eyes dimmed with fear. "And if you don't hang 'em on him, I'll lose my bean. This time he'll croak me, sure."

"He may try to," corrected the reporter. "I hope he does—or write another Barbary letter—or something. That's the play. That's what I got you out for. You're

to tantalize him into pulling something. But don't you worry about your bean. While he's watching you, Captain Billy will be watching him. My job is to look out for a double-cross. I must be sure that Big Moulini doesn't think up something new, and fool us all."

"He's mighty strong," agreed Tim Maloney, a dread, born of painful recollections, sweeping over him.

"Not so strong as he was," answered Trotter, remembering Hiram Inkweller's monologue on crooks. "Or rather, he used his power in a way that's got the Coast down on him. This thing will make him desperate. When the Coast sees you tonight, it will grin all the way from the Bucket of Blood clear around to the Moulin Rouge—and the grin will be aimed right at Big Moulini. Sam Ruppy's dance-hall will be paralyzed. And they'll all want to know who put up your bail money."

"So do I, Mr. Trotter."

"And that's the one thing I can't tell you, old man. You've got to trust me that it's from a friendly source—from a man who hates a cheap crook as he hates a rich liar; and you've got to obey my orders to prove to him that you did *not* write and plant those Barbary letters."

"Does he think I've forgotten Nellie? If I'd had any nerve left I'd have—"

"He does not. And right there let me say something: We know that Big Moulini planted that queer on you and got you sent up. We know he hounded your Nellie to her death. All that, we must hang on him. And the easiest and quickest way to hang it on him is to prove him to be the literary burglar. That's why we've got to draw his fire."

"I see," answered Tim Maloney, but he seemed a bit confused.

TROTTER eyed him intently for a moment, then, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang, he struck home. "Or," he exclaimed, "if you *did* plant those Barbary letters, now's the time to come clean, and we'll think up a new way to avenge your Nellie."

Tim Maloney—the taper-fingered Barbary Slim of the smelly dance-halls—went pale. His lips twitched, and his eyes dulled in pain. "Trotter," said he, and his words came thickly, "if you think I did, for God's sake take me back to jail right now, and take down your money."

Trotter wavered a moment. For the fraction of a second he wanted to grasp Tim's quivering hand. But he plunged on: "In jail, Tim—the other night, sitting on your hard cot, you said that as sure as Nellie O'Farrell was in heaven to hear you, you did *not* know it when you passed out those counterfeit tens, that you were *not* the literary burglar and that your one wish was to avenge Nellie, your one hope to clear your name. Now, sitting here, you are out on bail. It's a different situation. I'm not an officer. I have no gun. In two jumps you can be in the street. In two more you can be lost in traffic. You can be free and I can't get you. Now, if you're a crook, be a *real* one. But if you are Nellie O'Farrell's honest husband, give me your hand."

Tim Maloney's eyes were too numb to show resentment, and too honest to rally to any subterfuge. Plain truth shown foggily out of them. Plain Irish honesty welled from his heart. "I am—Nellie's—"

His throat clinched over the words; his head went down on his arm; and his groping hand sought Trotter's across the table.

SLOWLY, patiently and with the sympathy of a firm understanding, the reporter led the dulled man through the mazes of a daring plan, warmed his courage and steadied his nerve. Tim was to flaunt a serene independence at Ruppy's place—was to hint lightly, and smile heavily—was to snub Big Moulini and Big Moulini's gang, and then slap the back of the nearest bluecoat in ostentatious greeting.

"Act like you owned the place," said Trotter, "but don't try to buy it. Drink nothing but beer, talk 'influence'—and keep your dates with me. In a week you'll have them thinking you're a copper for a new crime ring that's on Moulini's trail. And when you see me around there, treat me like a faded fly-speck on a last year's sunbonnet. If anybody mentions the Barbary letters, tell 'em your new ones will be set to music. Keep sober, keep your nerve—and *smile*. Leave the rest to me."

There was more talk, more calming of nerves, and at ten o'clock Tim departed to make a sauntering cruise of the Coast, with Ruppy's as the final port of call. Karl Trotter remained in the little room, to rest, to think, and to study his own troubled plans. Then he would go directly to Ruppy's and be just a member of the

union. It would be fun to hear the hissing, helpless gasp that would go up when Barbary Slim, well dressed and smiling, sailed into port.

TROTTER had drawn the carbon copy of his advance story from his pocket, and was idling through it when he sensed that a boyish voice was drawling at him from the door of the tiny room. Dimly he heard it say:

"'Tis a wide deep night in some places; yet why so far from the Hall of Justice?"

It took Trotter a full minute to recognize the diffident, slumping figure in the door. Then he smiled in happy recognition and nodded in understanding silence. What, in the name of confidence, was Feather McGlinn doing way out in the tall timber of the Fillmore district?

Feather McGlinn, the smoothest confidence man on the Pacific Coast, who hunted alone, trailing his victims with the gentleness of a purring kitten, and who struck with the deadly accuracy of a coiled rattler. Feather McGlinn, decked in the war-paint of his tribe—Feather was wearing the doleful face of a lost child, and slumping in the cast-off clothes of old man Hard Luck. But he had walked out of his part to speak to the reporter, so the reporter was at liberty to make cautious inquiry.

"And why so far from the haunts of the easy?" asked Trotter cautiously.

Feather McGlinn slumped into the little room, slumped down at the table, and slumped on down into a picture of general depravity. It was his hunting pose. Only his smiling eyes, beaming happily out of his doleful face, spoke a friendly aside to the scribe.

"'Tis one of my outposts," breathed Feather dolefully. "I have a room here—right over your head. And laying on the floor up there, with my little wireless in my ears, I pick up lots of inside information."

Karl Trotter glanced hurriedly at the low ceiling, then back at Feather's smiling eyes. With something of a shock, he realized that Feather had heard his plotting with Tim Maloney—that, in the person of this con man, all the Barbary Coast knew his plans. He felt suddenly helpless. But as a good member of the fraternity, he smiled at his defeat. "Double-crossed myself, didn't I?" he said calmly. "Feather, I ought to kill you, right here."



From inside his faded shirt he produced a stethoscope. "It works," observed the con man.

"Try to be original," sighed the con man. "And buy me a drink. I can't afford to be seen squandering money here. The barkeep is positive I'm starving."

"Name it," agreed Trotter.

"Whisky sour," breathed Feather dolefully. "It will stimulate my intention to interview you."

Trotter pressed the button, and then glanced meaningly at the ceiling. "Were you interested?" he inquired, with a bit of fraternal sarcasm.

"Sure," replied Feather. "But you held back on me. Look!"

From inside his faded shirt Feather McGlinn produced a small, flat, padded box. Opening it, he let Trotter see an ordinary stethoscope, such as a physician uses on the human chest when seeking inside information. "It works," observed the con man. "But sometimes I have trouble with hardwood floors. Too loud, you know. Rasps my ears."

Trotter grinned in spite of himself. "Now I *know* I shall kill you," he said.

Feather McGlinn took a sip of his whisky and lolled most dolefully. "Why hold out on me, Trot? *Who* bailed out this musician dub?"

Trotter studied his new guest for a moment. "Can I trust you, Feather?"

Feather took a sip of whisky. Then his

eyes flicked a symptom of a signal at the low ceiling.

"I'm trusting *you*, Trot," he murmured.

"Well, then. It was the boss."

"Inkweller?" whispered Feather. Trotter nodded.

"Hm," answered Feather, and was silent a moment. "Reminds me of something. Has the old man ever told you how he followed my lead one time—up in Seattle, years ago—and trimmed the crooks out of a wagonload of kale?"

"You mean, in that reform campaign, after the Klondike petered out?"

"The same. Staged a play in Ryan's old place and rolled the gentry for fair."

"I've heard about it," answered Trotter. "But I didn't know that you—"

"Borrowed a little from the sweet old father of the reform candidate for mayor," drawled Feather. "Did it because the gang had been ragging me. Then that old Indian of yours turned it into a political play. Took the gang's own money to pay the dicks to run that same gang out of town. It was pretty."

"And you think—"

"I don't think. I know. If old Inkweller has bailed this piano-thumper and has put you on the trail of that damn-fool letter-writing stiff, it means that he will carry merry hell into the secret harbors of the Barbary Coast. When old Hiram starts, he's about as easy to stop

as a festive young cyclone back in my native Kansas."

"And now that you are wise to us," answered Trotter, "you will start a few opposition whirlwinds. Very well. I better turn my musician back to Captain Billy and save the Colonel's bail money."

"That would pain me," drawled Feather. "I sha'n't sleep nights till this cyclone has passed. I think I shall hit the rattler for Los and spend a few weeks observing the prosperity of the idle rich. Meantime—"

Trotter brightened. "You're not in with Moulini, then?"

"Meantime," continued Feather, entirely unruffled, "if a bright young reporter were to use his eyes and ears, the term of my banishment to west Iowa might be shortened."

Trotter wiggled in ecstasy. "You will lend me your wireless set?" he queried.

"I will not. Your family physician has a case full of 'em. Besides, if you were found dead, my little toy might be identified. I might be suspected. Embarrassing. I'm not a killer. I'm an actor. And I don't believe in a square crook's going out of his line. That's why I hate—"

FEATHER cut his words off with a snap.

Then, with an amused smile on his own nearness to making a slip, he continued: "There are a lot of gents down on Barbary who hate to see a skilled counterfeiter get the big head over letter-writing. And further, while they don't mind his trying to purloin a dancing-girl from her piano-thumping husband, they shy when a clever fixer starts flirting with the moll that belongs to one of his right-hand men. If that reporter I'm talking about doesn't use his eyes and ears pretty fast, he may wake up to find that a hell of a civil war has beat him to the correspondence school, and cheated him out of a pretty little reward that's on that counterfeiter's head—let alone on those plates."

Trotter whistled softly. "You mean," he queried, "that Moulini's a *counterfeiter*, and that there's a row brewing in his—"

"I am no city directory," interrupted Feather. "Nor do I give out free information, like the *Outstander's* information bureau. I am merely trying to give you an inspirational half-hour. After that, all you'll get from me will be absent treatment. Very absent. But let me ask you something. Have you been in Ruppy's lately?"

"Two or three times a week."

"Know Ron Rivers?"

"Yes. Met him once with you."

"Know his moll?"

"If it's that pretty brunette he dances with now and then, yes."

"Noticed that bunch of sparks she blazed out with lately? That thing they call a sunburst?"

"Couldn't help it. Nearly blinded me."

"Did it ever occur to you that such a bauble might have been made up out of the diamonds your literary burglar lifted from that banker's wife?"

"Gosh, no! Say, you don't mean that Ron Rivers—"

"A clever kid, and too sensible to write letters. But a certain fixer who's soft on the moll might have had it made and then dropped it where she could find it."

TROTTER sat in open-eyed wonder.

"My God!" he gasped. "And Ron Rivers works under Moulini. I begin to—"

"You've a long way to go," interrupted Feather. "And so have I. A date with a prospect. Way out by Papa Ghirardelli's sweetheart factory. Later, I'd like to see you again. Along about two o'clock in the morning I'm going to be terribly lonesome. Could you by any possibility spare time to come to my room?"

"At two A. M. I'll be waiting on your front steps. Where are they?"

"You will not. If I ever saw a reporter on my front steps I'd move the steps. You will be in the alley behind Wah Chung's dope-emporium. At two A. M. by the watch a rope ladder will descend to you from the skies above. You will ascend stiller than a *Romeo* hastening to keep a date with his *Juliet*. And wear some old clothes. You may possibly want to crawl around on your tummy in a certain musty attic I have in mind. And some old shoes that are soft and wont squeak on you. And bring a flash-light. Otherwise you might accidentally put your knee through the plaster and invite a flock of bullets your way. Now, pay your bill and, out in front, bid a cheerful good-night to the down-and-out. And by the way, if you should happen to bump into me at Ruppy's around midnight, be real friendly. You know, you haven't seen me for a week."

"Not for *years*," replied the reporter, and smilingly pressed the button for the waiter.

LATER, when Karl Trotter drifted into Sam Ruppy's dance-hall he was but dimly interested in what effect the entrance of Tim Maloney might have on the place. A new interest was uppermost in his mind, and the prospect of possible adventure lay before him. He found a side table, ordered food and drink, drew a midnight edition from his pocket and, to all outward appearances, was the inoffensive reporter taking his ease at his inn. A waiter who knew him cruised alongside, and under cover of mopping the table, sought information.

"I see that there Barbary Slim guy's out on bail," he whispered.

"Yeah," agreed Trotter indifferently. "I read about it."

"He's here now," confided the waiter. "Wow, but Ruppy's mad!"

"Why mad?" asked the reporter with mild curiosity.

"Ruppy put him out, and he came right back. Brought a bull with him. He's buyin' the bull drinks. They're sittin' over there now. Right near Moulini's party. Old man don't dare put him out again so long as the bull's with him."

Trotter lowered his paper and looked across the dance-floor to the tables on the opposite side. There he saw Tim Maloney, dapper and smiling, sitting with a blue-coated policeman whose contented look indicated that he was in no hurry to leave. Trotter recognized the officer as one of Captain Billetdoux's men. At the next table sat a gay party of six, Big Moulini among them. On Moulini's right sat the brunette moll of the blazing sunburst. They were drinking wine, and ostentatiously trying to appear indifferent to the curiosity that fairly throbbed through the place. Trotter struggled for an answer.

"Well, why the hell should Ruppy put him out?" he blurted in assumed indignation. "I've seen lots of jailbirds in here. Why the sudden righteousness?"

"Oh, Ruppy's all right," the waiter hastened to say. "That aint it. It's Moulini."

Trotter looked up at the waiter with more pretended curiosity; and the waiter, suddenly fearing he had gone too far, faded from sight. "My God," thought Trotter, "even the waiters know it, but I must crawl up rope-ladders to prove it. Fine world for bum police reporters. And look at that dick sitting within twenty

feet of the banker's lost diamonds. Zowie! Wait till I tell Captain Billy."

Now, telling Captain Billetdoux what he thought of one of that officer's pet men was the last thing Karl Trotter would do, and Karl Trotter knew it. But he was getting a bit excited with the whirl of events. And right then something more gripped his eyes. He saw Ron Rivers enter the dance-hall, discover his girl at the table with Big Moulini, go red at his discovery, then saunter with a stiffly assumed indifference to the bar at the rear.

SENSING murder in the air, Trotter acted quickly. He flagged the garrulous waiter. "Go tell Ron Rivers to mooch up this side of the hall," he directed. "Tell him I want to see him."

"Sure," agreed the waiter and sped away.

A daring impulse was working in Trotter's mind. "That crook, whoever he is, who wrote those letters," Hiram Inkwell had said, "has bent his license-plate a little." And Feather McGlinn had said: "When he flirts with the moll of one of his right-hand men—"

And Hiram Inkwell had said: "Our code is 'get it—print it'."

Code against code. Would it work?

Before the eyes of the reporter there sat Big Moulini, counterfeiter, literary burglar and woman-stealer. Even the waiters knew, yet the reporter must prove it, and the police must have evidence on which to convict. Dare he lay down his cards to Rivers? Could he, through that crook's jealousy, "get it" for old Hiram?

Ron Rivers stood beside the reporter's table, smoldering fires of hate smoking in his eyes. "You want *me*?" he queried coldly.

"Yes," answered the reporter. "You remember me—Trotter, of the *Outstander*. I met you through Feather McGlinn the night Ruppy made up that purse for Barbary Slim's wedding."

Ron Rivers' eyes took on a glint of cold steel. He suddenly remembered many things. "Yeah. What's on your mind?" he snapped.

"Well, for one thing, I want to buy you a drink," answered the reporter. "That is, if you think Moulini wont mind."

The shot went home. Rivers' teeth snapped. "To hell with Moulini! I'll drink where I please."

"Then have one with—"

A slap on the back interrupted Trotter. Feather McGlinn, modishly dressed and care-free, had appeared out of nowhere. "Hello, *Trot!*" he exclaimed, slipping into a chair. "You newspaper birds know everything. Tell me, *who* bailed this letter-writing stiff?"

"Keep off me," growled Trot. "It's after hours. Here I'm trying to buy Rivers a drink, and you butt in."

"Make it three," said Feather, and as he said it, his eyes signaled Ron Rivers ever so slightly. Ron took a chair. Feather raced on: "Sorry I can't stick around with you two dubs. I'll bet you're framing something. I'd like to sit in. But I can't. Tomorrow morning I leave for the sunny South. And I've several parting calls to make. Well, here's success to *honest crooks!*"

Over his glass Feather again telegraphed to Ron Rivers. Then he drifted away, buzzing from table to table, smiling here and there, but always keeping to his identity—the sleek panther of the Coast, aloof and self-sufficient, who hunted alone, and being self-sufficient, feared no double-crosses. As he cruised along, seemingly disdainful of all humanity, he shot a mischievous grin at the overconscious Moulini, nodded pleasantly to the lolling detective, ignored Barbary Slim, and faded through the outer entrance.

"When there's hell popping, Feather always manages to be somewhere else," observed Trotter.

RIVERS only grunted, but his attitude had changed. He had read Feather's signal. He hitched his chair closer to Trotter, and waited. The reporter, too, had caught Feather's signal, and it had crystallized impulse into purpose. He took from his inner pocket the carbon copy of his advance story and slipped it to an outer pocket, next his guest. "Ron," said he, "I know who bailed that piano-thumper. Hell of a story behind it. And looking at that diamond sunburst over there, I'm moved to come clean with you."

Ron Rivers stiffened, but sat silent. Trotter went on: "Sorry, boy," said he. "And not my place to talk about it. But I want the finish to my story. The first part's all done. City editor's holding it for release. In my pocket, next to you, is a carbon of it. Lift it, Ron, and go hide yourself. Read it. Then burn it. Then—well, if you want to see me again, I'll

be at the Rivoli Bar, out on Fillmore, at two tomorrow afternoon. If you don't come, all right. I won't squeal. And I know *you* won't. But one way or another, I must get the last chapter of my yarn, or I lose my job."

"Yeah," answered Ron Rivers coldly, without even the quiver of an eyelash.

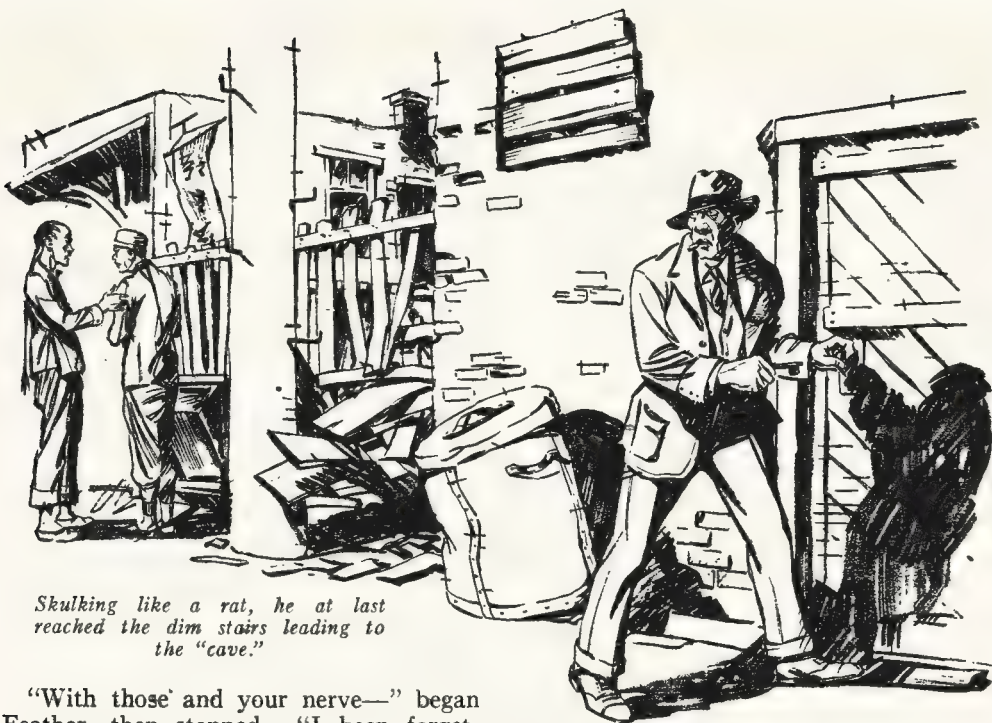
Trotter spread his newspaper out again. Ron Rivers bent over it with him. And as he pretended to read, Trotter felt light fingers in his outer pocket. Ron Rivers, outwardly a quiet and gentlemanly Ron Rivers, thanked his host for his drink, lighted a cigarette, and drifted out into the mazes of Barbary Coast. Many eyes watched him go, and then bounced back to the sunburst. Many whispers hissed about the place. The dancers bluffed their smiles and muffed their pet steps. A serene detective took another drink. Big Moulini was growing thoughtful. And a nervous reporter, bluffing at an appetite, tried to appear very much contented with a huge platter of cracked crab, and a stein of Bohemian brew.

IN the musty, unkept and poorly furnished room, lighted by a single bulb dangling on the end of its own dusty wire, Feather McGlinn, modish and dainty, seemed much out of place. Karl Trotter, in a disreputable hat, faded suit and cracked shoes, might have passed for the rightful tenant. Trotter stood wiping his hands where the rope ladder had scarred them, and conscious of his wailing feet protesting the spots where the rope ladder had wrenched them. "Is this another—outpost?" he asked casually.

Feather McGlinn dusted a chair carefully and drew it to the center of the room. He sat down on it noiselessly. Trotter drew another alongside and sank on it, dust and all, glad to get his weight off those protesting feet.

"Not an outpost," answered Feather, dropping into the soft, confiding tones of a hard-luck story. "It's an inpost. So near the rim of hell it ought to be interesting to an inquiring mind. I'm supposed to use it for effect on a prospect. Hell of a depressing hole-in-the-wall to show a sympathetic rube when I have to prove to him that I'm down and out. In reality, it's my best little information bureau. Did you bring your own?"

"Borrowed one," answered the reporter. "And I have my flash-light."



Skulking like a rat, he at last reached the dim stairs leading to the "cave."

"With those and your nerve—" began Feather, then stopped. "I keep forgetting," he smiled, "that you are chasing crooks. Under my constitution and by-laws, I should be leery of you. Hints and innuendoes will be my limit. For the same reason I cannot lend you my key. I can only lay it down where a man who wanted it could pick it up.

"Now, don't come in here by daylight. Come late at night, come by the stairway, and in these same clothes. I hope no one sees you, but if they do, they will think you're one of my prospects. Try to look as if you were going to buy some counterfeit money or a nice new gold brick. Look *guilty*! That'll brand you as a stranger to the Coast. And if you get lonesome and must have company, bring 'em up the rope ladder from the alley.

"And about that rope ladder. It has many uses. One is fire protection. Some night this firetrap is going to flare up. One flare—and then *good-night*! All that the firemen will find will be an odor of hell and a smooch on the sidewalk. If you're caught, go out that window, quick. Then again, in case of a siege, it might be used for going up through that trapdoor in the ceiling, and down through the ventilating shaft into Wah Chung's friendly arms. But that's not likely to happen to you.

"Now, get your directions! *That* way is the vent-shaft. Beyond it, and entered from another hallway, is a room. Oh,

boy! What an ambitious reporter with an inquiring mind might get out of that robbers' cave!"

Trotter nodded his thanks. He thought Feather was through. But that amiable crook, after a short, silent tour of inspection of window and door, returned to his chair. "From now on," said he, "I must high-brow you. My language shall be above reproach, my manner aloof. For instance, when I say, 'If *one* were to fall on the floor and bump one's nose, then *one* might get a pain,' it doesn't necessarily mean that you are said Mr. One. But yet you might be. It's none of my business. Do you follow my philosophic excursion?"

"Shoot, you idiot. My feet hurt."

"Very well, then. Were *one* to get on a table and open that trapdoor over your head, *one* might hook the rope ladder on the frame and go on up. Then, if one were to creep along the loose boards that go *that* way,—and keep his toes out of the plaster,—one might wiggle on past the vent-shaft till one came to another trapdoor. Then, were one to lay quiet for a couple of nights and listen through his private wireless, one *might* hear something. Particularly, just now, with Barbary Slim out on bail and Ron Rivers on the war-path, there *might* be much deviltry mulled over in that cave of hell. I'd like to be here to listen. But I won't be selfish.

"And—to *if* some more—if one were to slip that other trapdoor a crack and peep down, one would see only chairs, a table and some innocent-looking boxes. In the clothes-closet, if one could see in, would be suitcases. Some good ones, packed ready for get-aways. Some old ones, packed to burn quickly in case of fire. And if, along about daylight some morning, when the he-devils of Barbary have slipped away to their downy couches, *if* one *should* use his rope ladder and go down into that room, one would best not light any matches, nor smoke any cigarettes. Not unless one wants to get himself as thoroughly destroyed as some other evidence would be. If that room ever starts to burn, it will come so near to exploding that the roof of this joint won't have time to say good-by to itself."

Trotter squirmed. "*Nice!*" said he. "Suppose they should touch her off while *one* is listening to 'em up over the trapdoor?"

"*One* has to consider those things," answered Feather with a smile. "Sporting life has its thrills. And while one is listening, one would do well not to drop his watch, nor to scratch his ear, nor to *sneeze*. In fact, one would need to be terribly lonesome while one were playing mouse in the wall."

It was Trotter's turn to romance. "Very well," said he. "And if one *should* hear what one hopes to hear, and add up two and two and find it made four, how would you account for *one's* having been in your—your inpost?"

"I wouldn't," answered Feather calmly. "I would expect one to say that one had got all hopped up on Wah Chung's dream stuff and gone up the fire ladder in the vent-shaft. It has been done. Two hopped-up college boys. It took six of Wah Chung's little yellow angels to get 'em back down."

"Meaning," said the reporter, "that *one* must not squeal on one's friends."

"Just so. Nor should one blow the place till one has seen what might be seen. For instance, if one were accustomed to handle the etched plates that are used for printing ordinary news pictures, one *might* be wise enough to recognize the plates used in printing counterfeit money. That is, if one looked in the right suitcase and didn't set fire to the T.N.T. mixed in with 'em."

"My God!" gasped the reporter.

"There are such plates in the world," continued Feather lightly. "They might be somewhere on the Barbary Coast. They *might* be the ones for which the Treasury Department has offered a fat reward. I am not here to say. And don't forget the banker's diamonds, and various other trinkets. All I know is, I hate a counterfeiter anyhow. It's a sneaky business. And I particularly hate one who writes a lot of damn-fool letters and leaves 'em around for the police to read. I like a crook who puts a polish on a job, all right, but I hate one who adds a flourish and brags about it. Take me, for instance. I never tell anyone what I do. In fact, I never tell anyone *anything*."

"That's a fact," agreed Trotter. "You're a walking innuendo. And when you get back from the sunny South, you may have a big laugh on some one you know. But at least that same some one is going to try."

"For the next hour," said Feather evasively, "I shall be seen in several places where revelry holds no respect for the clock. I shall wear the contented look that befits a snake with a plump chipmunk under his belt. Whereby, I shall be so envied as to cloud any suspicion that I've been consorting with hated reformers. I shall then snatch forty-one winks of sleep before I hop the rattlers which lead hence to regions where I desire to be. And here's that stuff you let Ron Rivers read. Ron is no critic, but he says he likes your style. He has told that moll where she can go any time she's ready, but he doesn't pine to go there with her. Instead, he's going on the Daylight Limited with me. Boy, we shall be watching for your score-card in the Associated Press dispatches. 'Night!'"

With that, Feather McGlinn laid a small, flat key on his chair, and faded noiselessly out and away. A highly keyed reporter remained slumped on a hard chair, listening to the racket in his own lonesome brain. Was he on a hot lead, or was he walking into a double-cross, to be blown skyward with the tantalizing evidence so near his hand?

HOLBROOK, of the *Blade*, was a watchful bird, with a nose for news. He sulked over the mystery of that bail-money, and he missed his game of pinochle with Karl Trotter. The substitute man whom Cuts had sent down to do police for

the *Outstander* was eager to make a record. Instead of sulking over that mystery, he worried the life out of Captain Billetdoux trying to penetrate it. Holbrook watched him listlessly, quite sure that his activity meant that old Inkweller wasn't in on the play, yet secretly fearing that in some way or other another *Outstander* news beat was in process of incubation. Trotter's continued absence increased his suspicion.

Then a detective let drop a disturbing remark. "We haven't seen that Barbary Slim in three days," said he. "Looks to me like Cap's bail money is going to belong to the State." Holbrook took his nerve in his hands, called Cuts on the phone and asked for Trotter. "Laying off," answered Cuts curtly. "Back in a few days."

Holbrook sat down and scratched his nose. No Barbary, no Trotter. Something doing. He went to the Chief of Police.

"Say, Chief," he queried, "isn't there any way you can make Captain Billy come clean about that Barbary Slim bail-money? My sheet's liable to bust loose with a *demand*. Police corruption, and all that stuff."

"Let it yell," answered the bored chief. "I can't discipline Billy till the bail's been forfeited, and the trial is three months off yet. Meantime, he may know more about your bird than he's telling."

But Captain Billetdoux did not know a thing about that bird. Barbary Slim had evaporated. And the three-day silence on Trotter's part was disturbing. This business of assisting in a play was all right when results were visible, but assisting in the dark, with the other players not in sight, was no fun. The gossip around Headquarters was unpleasant. To make it worse, Cuts called him.

"Say, Billy," asked the city editor of the Inkweller pack, "I'm not trying to pry in, but if you know anything about Trot, you better phone his wife. She's getting worried."

"So am I," answered the unhappy detective. "Think I'll do some digging around tonight. Maybe that bird has hit Karl on the bean and beat it."

Thus the worry multiplied. Cuts, suddenly alarmed for the safety of his reporter, forgot his resentment over Trotter's stunt and became humanly anxious over the man's very life. "Darn him,"

growled Cuts. "After chasing disappearances for years, he pulls one himself. I could murder him."

He drew Karl's advance story from his desk and reread it. "And maybe he was right, after all," mused the worried deskman. "And maybe Big Moulini and his gang have dropped 'em both off a dock. Heck! These fool reporters will drive me crazy."

But even as Cuts worried, uninformed, Captain Billy was snapped into action. An eager voice got him on the phone. "This is Trot, Billy," it said. "Pry yourself loose and come out to the safe and sane regions of Fillmore. You'll find me at the Rivoli Bar. Keep mum and come quick. And don't make any dates for tonight. *All* night. Things are moving."

"I'll be right there," answered the detective happily. "And for God's sake, you bloomin' chump, phone your wife!"

FOUR of Captain Billetdoux's best men, drab in plain clothes, sauntered about the Coast, apparently idling away a quiet evening, but, as midnight approached, their wandering trails converged at a certain point, where they exchanged silent salutations and dropped out of sight to take up certain definite and hidden points of ambush. Meantime Captain Billy, in full uniform, was cruising the Coast from end to end, appearing, disappearing, reappearing. His apparent indifference was alarming to many alert eyes. In Ruppy's, for instance, he apparently did not see Moulini, but Moulini knew that he had been seen. Captain Billy apparently did not see Karl Trotter there, but his very indifference served to focus Big Moulini's attention very much on that same reporter.

Many a crook, seeing the captain of detectives so intentionally seeing nothing, became sure *he* in particular *had* been seen, and promptly decided to lie very low that night—and *all* night. The big boss might yell for help, but self-preservation was not to be overlooked.

At first Big Moulini had not recognized Karl Trotter. The reporter's sad hat, sadder clothes and soggy shoes were much unlike his habitual unobtrusive garb. He was so sloppy he was noticeable. And he had entered unobserved and loitered at a table near the door. Then he had moved silently to a table nearer Moulini. And after Billetdoux had floated conspicuously in,

had indifferently intensified Karl Trotter's presence, and had conspicuously floated out, the reporter had slid to a table still closer to the big underworld boss. Then he had sat there, accidentally glancing now and then at the girl of the big sunburst, and purposely hiding a sketch he was drawing of that very bauble.

Big Moulini, already worried over a violent unfulfillment of certain new plans, became obviously indifferent to the presence of the news man—so indifferent as to be very obvious. He called Ruppy with a nod of his head, and ordered the proprietor to ascertain what the reporter might be drawing with such obvious secrecy. Ruppy sent a waiter by way of circumnavigating the hall, and the waiter reported that an accurate sketch of the sunburst was in progress.

This, on top of his twisted schedule of activity, was unpleasant news to the big boss. He tried to sip his wine indifferently. He tried to think keenly behind an indifferent sneer. He succeeded indifferently. Karl Trotter had sensed the hard-breathing waiter at his elbow, had momentarily exposed his nicely finished sketch, had watched the report go around the world to Moulini's table, and had seen its effect. He now turned his sketch upside down on the table, slumped in his chair, and deliberately eyed the big boss.

"He's staring at you," whispered the excited moll of the sunburst, her flying hands betraying her nerves.

"Beat it," whispered Big Moulini. "Go somewhere and take off your sparks. Have Ruppy slip 'em back to me. I'd better hide 'em till I know what's doing."

BIG MOULINI, a nervous and deserted boss of the underworld, sat groping for an answer to his puzzles and for a plan in his emergency. He suddenly regretted the episodes of the literary burglar. He sensed what his nearest men had told him, that those letters would draw too much attention to somebody. And for the moment Big Moulini feared that that "somebody" was, right now, sitting under the gun of the daily press. He could actually visualize that penciled sketch in print.

He tapped his inner pocket gently. A letter crinkled under the slight pressure of his guilty finger—a new Barbary Slim letter was there, prepared and ready for use. Everything ready—except the victim.

He had worked hard on this letter—

worked hard to make it flippant, and to make it give the impression that Tim Maloney was the only Barbary Slim, and that Barbary Slim was the real literary burglar. He had carefully kept to the disguised handwriting of the former gems. And here it lay, useless and *dangerous*, in his own pocket.

He had read it to the moll, and she had praised it. He could visualize the text. With the eyes of memory he reconstructed it:

"Thanks, old scout, for bailing me out," it read. "But you forgot to give me expense-money. So I'm cracking one more safe, and then I'm on my way to pastures new. I ought to promise to return the bail-money, but I'm not going to. You wont miss it, and think of the fun the other papers will have over old hard-boiled Hiram Inkwell's bailing out a crook, and that crook's skipping the tra-la-lou. It's worth money to the town. I'll buy your paper, if I can find it where I'm going, to see how you get back at them. Serves you right for trusting anybody." And this was signed, "Barbary Slim," and the envelope was addressed "Hiram Inkwell, Philanthropist."

His plan had been for the police to find Barbary Slim and Ron Rivers dead in an outlying roll of the sand dunes, apparently shot in a duel over spoils, this new letter safe in Barbary's pocket. A nice little scheme to leave Big Moulini free from his two best little worries.

It had been carefully planned. Ron Rivers was to kidnap Barbary, take him to the dunes, croak him, and find Big Moulini waiting in a car to whiz him away. That much Ron had been told to be ready to do. But he had not been told that Big Moulini would be laying in wait to croak *him*, throw a gun down by Barbary's dead hand and leave the bodies together. A beautiful double-cross. Too bad to have to bump Ron Rivers, but what wont meddling with molls lead a clever gent to do?

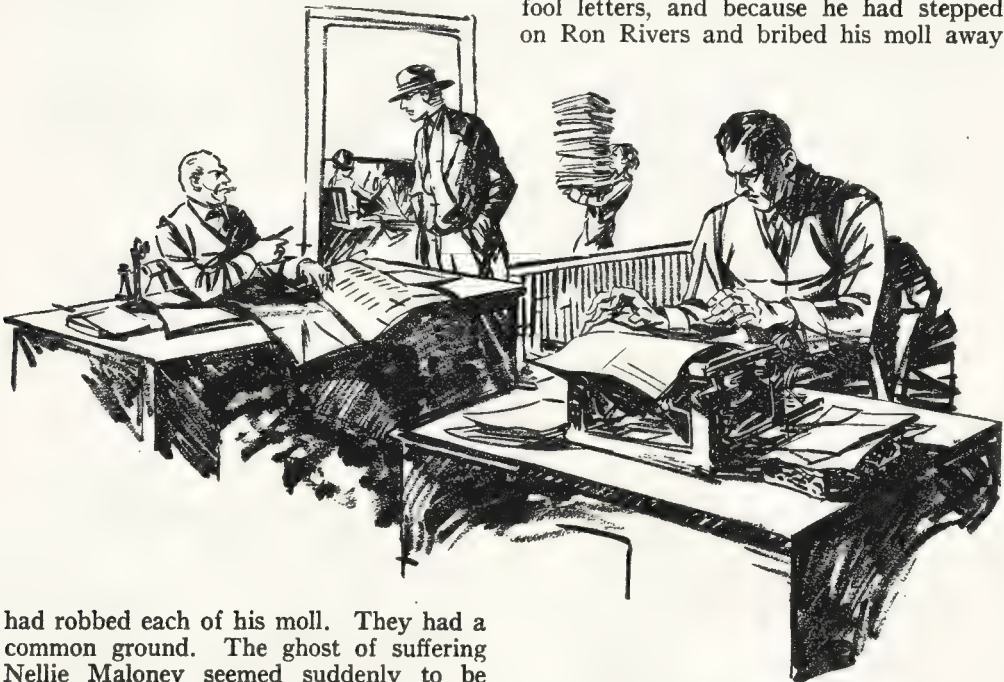
INSTINCT, however, had saved Ron Rivers. He had seen the coming storm in Trotter's advance story, and had fled to be completely safe when the crash came. He had fled the police, not dreaming of Moulini's proposed treachery. So when Moulini had sent for Ron to give the final order, the gang could not find him. Then, with half his plan gone wrong, he had sent the gang to kidnap Barbary Slim, and had

planned another end for that troublesome obstacle. He would step on Barbary now, and cross the other rivers when he reached them. But no Barbary was to be found.

Sitting under the stare of the reporter, Big Moulini suddenly visualized Ron and Barbary *together*, plotting his end. He

posted. And shake that moll. Damn a bundle when you're in trouble!"

But Big Moulini's guilty mind was picturing more troubles. He was thinking of that secret room—the cave of hell—to which he alone had a key. Suppose it *were* a double-cross? Suppose the gang had turned on him? Turned because of those fool letters, and because he had stepped on Ron Rivers and bribed his moll away



had robbed each of his moll. They had a common ground. The ghost of suffering Nellie Maloney seemed suddenly to be hovering very close to Big Moulini's shoulder. And look where he would, he could not pick up one of his gang.

When Sam Ruppy came to him to slip him a handful of trinkets, the fingers that grasped the diamonds were icy. "Take me to your office," whispered Moulini hoarsely, and followed the dance-hall man as he led the way through a maze of blurred faces.

"What's the matter?" asked Ruppy, in the quiet of his office, well knowing that hell was loose on the Coast.

"Matter!" growled Big Moulini, his shaking hands trying to secrete those diamonds in an inside pocket. "*Matter!* Didn't you see everybody rubbering at me? And that damn' reporter? And where's my gang? Are they locked up, or is it the grand double-cross?"

Sam Ruppy, in the presence of the powerful captain of underworld industry, was silent. His own hands shook. "You better fade for a while, boss," he suggested. "You can get me word and I'll keep you

"Jump to Police Headquarters! Find Captain Billy. Make line sketches of jewelry and counterfeiting plates. Hustle!"

from him? Wouldn't they try to rob that cave? Rob it to get certain trinkets that were there? And maybe carry certain evidence to his own room and plant it where the snooping police would stumble on it? His guilty conscience sent his fingers to caress that sunburst again. Those diamonds could be turned to ready money if he had to go in hiding. And there were other diamonds in the cave. He came to a desperate resolve. He would go there, and if in time, grab the treasure, and start the clock that would set fire to the place. He'd kept those damn' counterfeit plates long enough. Time to get rid of them.

So through alleys, skulking like a rat, through dim halls, flitting like a still dimmer shadow, he followed his secret trail till at last he reached the dim stairs leading to the cave. He had watched for big Billetdoux and had not seen him. He had watched for his gang and had not seen

one of their treacherous faces. He had watched for Karl Trotter, but had not seen him, taking the slumped figure in the alley back of Wah Chung's to be a dreaming outcast. He reached the door of the cave and listened. Silence everywhere. No hint of danger. No evidence of plunder. He inserted his key, opened stealthily, shut himself in the dark and reached for the light.

As it flared, he felt a chill clamp down on him. From the opened trapdoor above, a white-faced Tim Maloney covered him.

"Put 'em up," commanded Tim, his voice shaking from his overwrought nerves.

Trapped! And by his despised enemy. Resentment brought a flash of courage to the deserted criminal. A sneer sprang to his white lips. "Put 'em up? For *you*? Why, lady-fingers, you couldn't—"

The bulking Captain Billetdoux stepped from the inner closet, gun held before him. His glittering uniform made him look mountains high. His words were curt. "For me, then! *Quick!*"

From the hallway the four dicks in plain clothes pounded in, Karl Trotter at their heels. A groan of relief came down from the pale Barbary flattened above the trapdoor. Big Moulini suddenly realized that his unrestrained hands were up—way up!

Moving quickly to his task, the captain of law and order disarmed the captain of secret devices, handcuffed him and spread the contents of his pockets on Big Moulini's own conference table. There lay the sunburst, and the latest composition of the literary gangster. The big underworld boss sank helplessly to one of his own council chairs.

Karl Trotter was glowing in the success of his plans. He covered it by a pretense of journalistic concern. "Good evening, Mo," he began, flipping out paper and pencil. "I've been a long time trying to get an interview with the literary burglar. Tell me, how does it feel to be famous?"

But Big Moulini was not heroic. No calm resignation in the slippery crook who had bent his own license plate. None of the poise of the dead game sport in the face of damaging evidence. Just a deserted and trapped sneak. "To hell with you!" he growled. "Somebody double-crossed me."

"Sure," agreed Trotter. "The public double-crossed you. The nice, good-natured public that likes fair play. Now, haven't you a little message for that same public?"

Big Moulini had no words. He stared in dejection at his own imprisoned wrists. "Say it," urged Trotter. "It's been said before."

The underworld captain, goaded in his helplessness, snapped back. "Say *what*?"

"*The public be damned!*" drawled Trotter. "Isn't that your creed?"

Captain Billetdoux let a short, appreciative "*Ha!*" escape him. He too was happy. But he was still on duty. "Cut it, Trot," he snapped, and pushed the conference table under the trapdoor.

"Come down, Tim," he ordered. "Show me where those plates are. And be careful of your gun."

"Take it," exclaimed Tim, happy to get the cold thing out of his hands.

Big Moulini had been white before. Now his face died into ghostly gray.

BILL CUTS whirled from his phone, grabbed Trotter's advance story from his desk and began bellowing orders. All resentment for his reporter's wild dream had fled. Pride in his man's achievement mounted on his relief as a caretaker. Now, at midnight, the story had broken—a splendid beat for the old sheet.

"Hey, *copy desk!*" he roared. "Take this thing. Write in Big Moulini's name and rush it. No cutting. More to come. 'By' line goes. —*Boy!* See who's in the art room. And a camera man. —*Boy!* Find Screech and tell him Trot wins. We've got the literary crook. Tell him I want the first-page lead. —Hey, *Tress!* Come here. Help me out. Read Trot's stuff and then write me a bully introduction. Wave the flag. And I want a running story of Moulini's life. —And you, Hig, jump to the morgue! Bring up everything we've got that touches this story."

Boys and men snapped to their tasks. A man from the art room came on the run. "Jump to Police Headquarters," Cuts yelled. "Find Captain Billy. Make line sketches of some jewelry and counterfeiting plates he'll show you. Take a cameraman to mug Big Moulini. Hold another here to mug Tim Maloney. Trot's bringing him here. *Hustle!*" And then, as the coatless managing editor, followed by a troubled make-up man, hove in sight: "Yes, Boss. Trot wins. Hell of a spread! All I need is *room!* And leave Colonel Inkwell to *me*. I want to tell him myself." Bill Cuts was raging in happiness!

Trotter came in then—a sloppy, disreputable Trotter, but all smiles. The relief man was with him, and between them a self-conscious piano-player. A free Barbary Slim—unafraid of his liberty!

"Here's Maloney," snapped Trotter. "Get his story while I write my follow-up. He pulls down three rewards on this. And he's *free!*"

And with that Karl Trotter threw a thudding canvas bag on the city editor's desk, and turned away, to race into the tale of the capture.

IT took a seasoned reporter to get things straight from a happy Barbary Slim. But gradually the practiced scribe straightened out the tangle of rope ladders, dusty attics, stethoscopes, hours of eavesdropping, and the final daring search of the damaging suitcases in that cave of hell. In the end the reporter sidled over to the city editor. "Look here, Mr. Cuts," he said, "Trot has waived his claim on parts of those rewards. Says this bird is to get all of it."

"Leave Trot out," answered the city editor shortly. "He knows his own business."

But something seemed to creep into the city editor's heart and warm it. He glanced with a bit of human pride at Trotter's back, where the reporter sat pounding over the typewriter. Taking that hastily written resignation from his desk, Cuts read it again. Then he turned it over and adjusted his pen.

"Your resignation from the police run is hereby accepted," he wrote. "You will report tomorrow on special assignments."

He put the bit of paper under a weight, took up the sack of gold, and called the overwhelmed piano-player to him. "Come with me, Barbary," he said kindly. "We'll go hand your bail-money back to Colonel Inkweller. I think he'd like to see you."

OUT of the rush, the clatter, and the turmoil, the story took shape, developed, and blossomed into type and pictures. What was top news an hour ago now took second place, and a new achievement for the *Outstander* roared across its own first page. Hiram Inkweller—the "old man," and the main dynamo of the organization—loll'd in his sanctum, devouring the duplicate proofs as they were showered to his desk. He was happy over clearing a fellow-creature's name from calumny. He

was proud of his prying, nervy, loyal pack. He was proud of Trotter for ditching a share of those rewards. Proud of Cuts for burying personal resentment in the hour of organized achievement. Yes, upstairs and down, the men who made the *Outstander* were *his* men. And he did not forget that he was *their* leader.

It was late when, muffled in his shaggy overcoat, his black fedora pulled solidly over his eyes, Hiram came out of his den and waddled across the news-room. Twenty tired men stopped their post-mortems to glance up at the pudgy figure, with its pudgy arms beating time to the short, nervous Inkweller step. The old face was serene. His apparent hurry was all a bluff. He would have welcomed another sudden news break as an excuse to stick around still longer.

Reaching Cuts' desk, he dumped the canvas sack back on it. Poking it with his cane, he asked what he ought to do with it.

"Don't know, Colonel," answered the city editor, suddenly puzzled. "No place around here to keep a thousand in gold."

"Guess that's right," agreed Hiram, and stood as if thinking, idly poking the sack again.

As he poked, his eyes lit with a sudden inspiration. Tapping the city editor's desk with a thump that brought the news-room to a dead silence, he called over his shoulder to the police reporter's desk.

"Trot," he commanded, "come here a minute." The reporter, puzzled at the summons, crossed to him.

"You're married, aren't you?" asked the old man, curtly.

"Yes, sir."

"Any kids?"

"Yes, Colonel. Three."

"So! Pretty good for a thirty-year-old."

"I'm thirty-five, Colonel."

"Own your own home?"

"Well, in a way. I'll have it paid out in another year."

"That so? And *you* turned down your half of those rewards. Why?"

Trotter was a bit fussed. Apparently he was not standing any too well with the hard-headed publisher. "Well, sir," he mumbled, "I thought Tim deserved it. He worked hard on this. He searched that cave while I stood guard. And it's coming to him another way. Look what he's suffered."

The old man's eyes twinkled. "And be-

Held for Release

sides," he added, "it wouldn't do for a regular member to ditch a pal for pay. You landed your story and you saved your face in the union."

The police reporter brightened. "Well, yes," he agreed. "It may be better that way."

"Wise of you," continued old Hiram. "Always protect your professional standing. But I'm sorry for your wife. She has a nut for a husband. Has no sense when it comes to money. Tell you what you better do. Take this to her with my compliments. Tell her to hold it for release to suit herself."

And with that Colonel Hiram Inkweller deftly tossed the bag of gold at the astonished reporter, who fumbled it, and let it hit the floor with a crunching thud. When Trotter had recovered it, Hiram was disappearing toward the elevator.

The room caught its breath in a gasp of delight, but Trotter stood staring helplessly at his treasure. Cuts was the quickest on the trigger. He stood up and extended a hand.

"That's fine, Trot," he said. "I'm proud of you. We all are. You beat me fairly, and I'm glad the Colonel saw it. But say, boy, don't let all that wealth go to your head."

"Not to *my* head," answered Trotter, still in a daze. "Say, when I wake up my little wife and hand her this—"

Trotter drew the back of his hand across his eyes. Promotion, Cuts friendly, and a thousand dollars! He turned and started for his desk, steering a wobbly course through the mists that clouded his way.

Four rigid copy-boys ranged along the bench, stared in fright, their eyes wide, and their lips gone white. A police reporter blubbering? Their churning stomachs told them the very world had come to an end!

TWO days later two light-fingered gents, lolling in the shade of southern palms, devoured their anxiously awaited copies of the *Outlander*.

"There!" exclaimed the dapper one. "I told you so! Trot kept his word. Nothing about you. Nothing about me. He just killed that big stiff, and killed him pretty. Saved you a lot of trouble. You'll be the gang's new boss."

"Yeah," agreed the other, a pale man, with cold hate still gleaming in his dulled eyes. "I got you. He's a *regular* guy. Say, when do we hit for the Coast?"

Cheating the Dervishes

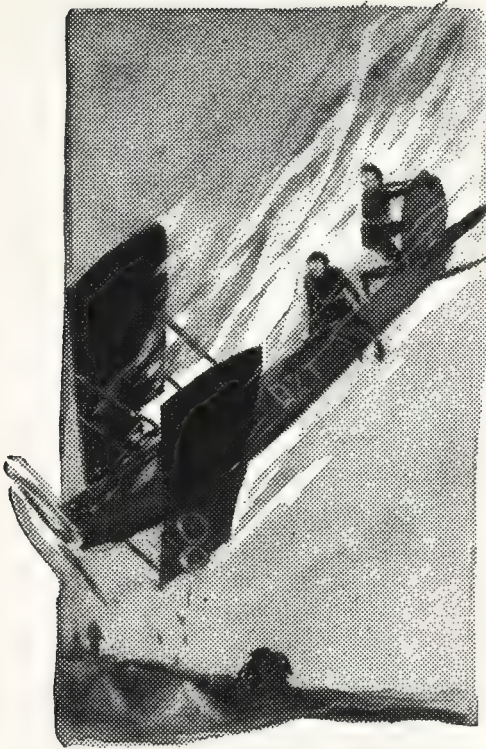
Flying and fighting: this world has yet to supply something to exceed it in excitement. Here are flames, too—in the air.

By **Leslie
Kilmister**

IT was the 14th of June, 1917, and B Squadron Royal Flying Corps lay sleeping and baking under a fierce North African sun.

With the exception of the guard, the entire squadron was off duty from eleven A. M. to three P. M. every day during the summer on account of the terrific heat, and about the only sounds to be heard in the camp during the rest period were the snores of the men in the tents, and the insistent hum of millions of flies and other obnoxious insects.

I might explain here that B Squadron, which consisted of six two-seater airplanes, eight flying officers, and about twenty mechanics (of which latter I was one), was located in a small valley some twenty miles to the south of Sollum (on the northwest frontier of Egypt), whither we had been sent some five weeks previously from our headquarters near Alexandria to coöperate with the infantry and camel-corps stationed in Sollum; our work consisting of spotting out the positions of our enemy, the Senussi Arabs: photographing their camps, and harassing them with bombs and machine-gun fire. We also occasionally flew out over the waters



of the Mediterranean in an effort to spot any lurking enemy submarines.

Altogether, we were kept fairly busy, but we did not conduct any night operations, so every evening saw as many men as the machines would carry, winging their way to the sea to enjoy a swim under the Oriental moon.

Some five miles to the east of us was C Squadron, consisting of a number of single-seated scout machines which were engaged in "spotting" and in dispatch-carrying.

Now, C Squadron used to enjoy its evening dip in like manner to us, and it was through a mishap to one of C's machines that I received as many thrills packed into a few hours as anyone could wish for.

ON the date mentioned in the beginning of the story I was peacefully sleeping with the rest of the boys when my siesta was rudely disturbed by an orderly putting his head into the tent and yelling my name.

Sleepily, I sat up and inquired the why and wherefore of all the commotion.

"Flight commander wants you at once," he answered.

Hastily pulling on a pair of canvas shoes (I had gone to sleep in my clothes: shirt, and the short pants of khaki twill we wore), and donning my sun helmet I hurried away to the "R. A. F." tent where my machine was housed, and which also served as an office for the members of No. 2 Flight.

It might be as well to explain here that a R. A. F. tent is a large tent the shape of an airplane, and consists of duck or other tent material supported by a light metal framework, and is used by mobile squadrons on active service to protect the machines against the weather, and also serves as a workshop.

As I hurriedly neared the R. A. F. tent, the flap in front was thrown back, and out stepped Captain Butler, the commander of my flight.

"Machine ready for the air?" he inquired crisply.

"Yes sir," I answered.

"All right, put in four extra drums for the machine-gun, two extra lines of petrol, and your tool-kit," he commanded. "I'll tell you about it when we get going," he added; "no time now."

It did not take many minutes to get the stuff aboard, my pilot lending a hand; then we drew back the flaps of the hangar, I swung the propeller, and after running the engine for a couple of minutes to warm it up, we taxied out, turned our nose into the wind, and were off!

As soon as we left the ground, I put on the head-phones with which the machines were equipped, and Captain Butler explained the reason for all the hurry.

IT appeared that one of the machines belonging to C Squadron had become lost "somewhere in the desert" on its return from the bathing party the previous night, and we had been sent to locate it.

Seven machines including the missing one had set out for home after the bathing, but only six had arrived. The compass of the lost bus had been taken out the day previously for adjustment, and it was owing to the lack of this important instrument that the pilot of the missing scout machine had passed miles wide of his camp.

The simple fact that one of the machines had failed to return from the bathing party had not unduly alarmed the commander of C Squadron; it was a common custom for some of his men to spend

the night in Sollum and return the next morning.

But when noontime of the next day arrived and the pilot had failed to return, C's commander began to fear that all was not well, and was thinking of asking the commander of B Squadron to send a machine to Sollum (all C Squadron machines being out on patrol) to see if the pilot was having trouble with his bus, when a corporal and a trooper of the Camel Corps arrived, bringing with them a native.

It appeared that this native, belonging to one of the friendly villages in the district, had seen an airplane "fall from the sky," to use his words, far to the southward, just after dawn that morning. He at once set out to give the news to the first British troops he met (doubtless with visions of a large amount of "baksheesh"), and eventually came up with the Camel Corps patrol, who brought him in with all speed.

As he had no machines whatever at hand, the commander of our sister squadron had appealed to us for help. There was every reason for haste, as the pilot of the missing single-seater would have no food or water with him, and had already spent several hours in the blistering heat of the desert, and what was far worse, he had come down right in the heart of the enemy's country, and to be taken prisoner meant worse than death—cold-blooded torture.

We had been flying just over an hour, when I thought I saw a faint column of smoke far over to the eastward, and I communicated this fact to the pilot, who immediately swung the bus around and flew in that direction. Keeping my glasses trained on the spot it was not long before I saw that our quest was ended.

THE single-seater was a mass of wreckage, but the pilot was apparently uninjured, for he was feeding bits of his wrecked machine on to the signal fire that had led us to him.

Still keeping my glasses on him, I was thinking he would soon hear our engine and give us a wave, when all of a sudden he spun half around and made a jump for cover behind the wreckage of his machine. Wondering what on earth had caused him to do this, I shifted my glasses over to the direction in which he had been facing, and what I saw nearly made my heart stand still.

Coming along at a swift trot were about forty Senussi mounted on camels, and when I saw them they must have been about five hundred yards from our unfortunate comrade. My pilot had also seen what was taking place, and as we were now almost over the wrecked machine, he put the nose of our bus down, and we rushed earthward in a swift glide.

Swinging the machine-gun around, I fired on the attacking Arabs, but owing to the rate at which we were falling, and the shimmer on the desert's surface, they made a poor target, and none went down before the fire.

The Arabs instantly stopped, however, jumped off their camels, and dropping flat on their faces on the sand, began firing at us.

We landed as close as we dared to the wrecked machine, the Senussi greeting us with a hail of lead, none of which, however, took effect. The pilot of the crashed machine dashed from the cover of the wreck, and clambered aboard our bus. As he did this, my pilot opened the throttle and we began to move, but we did not get far, for a wire from the wrecked machine that was half buried in the sand had fouled the tail-skid of our bus and was holding us back.

The pilot of the wrecked scout plane immediately jumped down and started tugging frantically at the piece of wire, while I brought my gun to bear on the Arabs, whose fire was growing pretty hot.

I HAD only fired a few rounds when the gun gave a violent jerk and jammed; an Arab bullet had struck the gun and had bent the cocking handle, putting the weapon temporarily out of action. When the machine-gun ceased to speak, the Arabs gave a wild yell of triumph, and started to run toward us, firing as they came. They were pretty poor shots, and we did not fear getting hit while they were running, but we expected every second that a chance bullet would strike our propeller and shatter it.

Luckily, however, this did not happen. As the machine-gun jammed, Captain Butler and myself drew our revolvers and opened fire on the enemy. As I fired my first shot, an idea struck me.

"Shoot it, shoot it!" I yelled to the pilot of the scout.

Immediately grasping my idea, he drew his gun, placed the muzzle against the

offending wire and fired. The wire parted; the scout pilot climbed on board; Captain Butler opened the throttle, and we moved slowly over the soft sand. The Arabs had ceased firing now, and were making frantic efforts to catch us before we could take off, and were gaining on us rapidly.

We were in a patch of very soft sand, and the engine could hardly pull the machine through, so the scout pilot and myself jumped off and pushed on the wings, causing it to make better headway. Suddenly we came to a patch of firmer sand, and the bus bounded forward; we climbed aboard as best we could, and only just in time, for as we took off, the foremost of the Arabs were clutching at our tail plane; we literally slipped right through their fingers!

We emptied our revolvers at them, but with what effect we could not see, owing to the cloud of dust we left behind.

In but little over an hour we landed at C Squadron's airdrome, set down the rescued pilot, and then started out for our own camp; and it was while flying the paltry five miles separating the two camps that we ourselves came to grief.

WE must have been less than a mile from home, and Captain Butler had throttled down the engine to glide in, when I heard a loud *pop* from the front of the machine, and saw a tongue of flame come snaking along the floor-boards toward me. One of the Arab bullets must have punctured our tank, though why it did not cause a fire before it did is a mystery.

In vain I tried to beat out the flames. Then as it became too hot for me in the front seat, I got out onto the wing and gave the news to the pilot in the rear. He put the nose of the bus down at a steeper angle, and as he did so the flames broke through into his cockpit.

We had no parachutes, and anyway we were too low to use them even if we had been so equipped. There was only one thing to do: get to the tail of the bus and trust to luck.

We were about five hundred feet high at this time; the pilot locked the joy-stick central, and we crawled down the fuselage to the tail.

With the controls locked in this way the

bus continued down at a safe angle; and we did not worry a great deal about the outcome, for we expected to get off at the worst with a few bruises, as we had seen lots of machines crashed in the soft sand, and their occupants escape with hardly a scratch.

But when we were about sixty feet off the ground, the wings burst into flames, and the machine dropped like a stone on to the top of an "R. A. F." tent belonging to No. 3 Flight. As we crashed, I had a vision of the hangar folding up like a concertina.

Then I was catapulted madly through the air and landed headfirst in a huge mound of loose sand that had drifted up behind the tent.

For what seemed endless years I felt as if I was swimming in air, but I suppose it was only about five minutes later when I woke on a cot in the Red Cross tent. I felt myself all over to see if I had lost any members. Then, satisfied that I was all in one piece, I sat up on the cot.

As I did so, my eyes fell upon a figure sitting on a cot at the opposite side of the tent. This being was having his head swathed in yards of bandages by the doctor and his aide.

It was Captain Butler, my companion in misfortune, but things were not as bad with him as they appeared at first glance.

When our bus crashed, he'd been flung clean over my head, over the heap of loose sand that had broken my fall, and had skidded along the surface of the desert on his face for a distance of about thirty feet, removing much skin therefrom: hence all the bandages.

NEITHER of us was really hurt, but the kindly doc insisted on us resting a couple of days, and as we were now without a machine for patrol, this arrangement suited us nicely.

The net results, to us, of that little adventure were: one week later a trip to Cairo for a new machine, six weeks later the presentation to Captain Butler and myself of a gold watch from each of the officers of C Squadron, and the presentation by the boys of our own squadron of the permanent, and perhaps appropriate, nickname of "Halley's Comets."

"Tarzan", the great romantic success of our times, appears in his latest adventure upon another page—and continues next month: "Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle."

*Rapids, rocks—
and a raft, to-
gether with need
of big bridge
timbers down
the Lillooet and
a premium
for delivery
brought about
this adventure.*

By
**Ian
Nicholson**



Driving the Lillooet

HAD I realized just what I was in for when I took on the job of rafting the bridge timbers down the Lillooet River, probably I never would have undertaken it.

River driving is usually considered hazardous and hard work, and rightly so. The element of danger is invariably prominent in this sort of work, and anybody that is looking for a few thrills is never disappointed.

Now, happily married, I had forsaken the river for more tranquil living on the little farm I held on the banks of Lillooet on which once I had enjoyed such risks. "Safety first," was henceforth to be my motto.

Had not urgent need of money arisen, I never would have taken on the job; yet we were in need of a tidy sum to tide us over an impending situation, and the driving of the bridge timbers seemed the only chance of making real money quickly. And so I took on the job.

Now, at certain seasons the Lillooet is a devil incarnate—and this was one of those seasons. She was too low and swift,

with practically all of her fangs bared to receive the intruder.

Everybody said it couldn't be done—the regular drivers had refused to sign the contract, and the bridge contractors were offering handsome prices, as they had a time limit on the bridge and stood to lose a lot of money if they failed to complete their work on time. Yet apparently I was the only one tempted.

"It can't be done!" declared Skookum Jim, the best Siwash driver thereabouts. "Him too hellish—too much him white-water, all snag, stick 'em raft—break him up. You damn fool!" And he spat deliberately. "Me best man on river—by and by you come for Skookum—him no help. You takem my job—I keep for when river better!"

And I think most everyone shared in some degree Skookum's opinion. I think it was the oft-repeated phrase, "It can't be done," that made me more determined than ever to try.

The first raft was a small one I made purposely just to see what pranks the river would play with me. To my surprise

and delight, I ran the whole gantlet of snags, white-water and dangerous bends, and came out at the landing with raft intact.

I ate supper that evening elated with my success and told the little wife that there was nothing to the job and that I already had it cinched. The next day I had the boys make up a much larger raft, and waved a jaunty farewell as I took off. My joy was short-lived, however, as the heavy raft was more than I could handle in the swift current. At the first bend of the river was a mammoth log jam, and I was heading straight for this.

I exerted all my strength on my sweep; yet I was unable to swerve the huge raft from the impending doom. We struck hard, and I was hurled pellmell into the swirling water. I came up just in time to grasp a spar extending below the end of the jam and clambered out of the icy water onto the bulwark of river flotsam.

The raft was stuck hard and fast; the current was pounding it further onto the jam every moment, and the timbers were beginning to get loose and bounce about in such a fashion that I thought at any moment the whole structure would break up and swirl away down the river to be a total loss.

I seized my peevy, which fortunately was still holding fast where I had deeply embedded it in the soft timber, and set to with might and main to peevy the raft loose. Against the powerful current beating down it was no easy task, and more than once I was on the verge of leaving the raft and giving up the whole business. Still, I was always willing to give just one more try. I would get it so far—then back the current would drive it again. I was breathless and well exhausted from my efforts, when suddenly the end of the raft swung out-stream in the current, and I had just time to jump on and be whirled downstream on my crazy craft.

THE raft now was so loosely held together that it was utterly impossible to guide it, and I was left mostly to the mercy of the stream. The worst happened just above the cañon. A slightly submerged snag caught and held us fast, and the flexible raft wrapped itself about it in such a way that I knew we were there to stay.

Darkness was closing in—it was a lonely

spot on the river with dark towering cottonwood and cedar casting long shadowy patches across the silvery water. At this point the river was a hundred yards across, and we were about the middle of it. Something had to be done and done quickly if I was not to remain there indefinitely. The water was too cold and swift to hope to swim it; and besides I was so near the cañon that I would assuredly be dragged into it. Then in a flash came the idea!

Gingerly I unloosed two of the outside logs, and using the cable from one end of the raft, I bound them strongly together; the remainder I made doubly secure from being washed away by snagging them to the old root on which they had grounded. On my improvised raft I was able to continue my journey without further mishap.

WELL—you may be sure I wasn't so darn optimistic that night as I ate a late supper; and as I assured my wife that everything was going fine and dandy, I wondered if maybe after all I had been foolhardy.

I took no more big rafts after that, and things went better; still, there were days when it seemed no human ingenuity and strength could guide a raft down the river without getting hung up somewhere. However, gradually the timbers at one end were becoming less and at the other piling up, and so far I had not lost a stick.

Time passed, the terminating date of my contract was at hand, and there still remained a goodly portion of the job unfinished. I realized that if I was to finish on time, I must have help—and I must finish on time, for the bridge contractor was rushing the bridge to completion, and any delay would be costly. Skookum was the only man available, and I went to him. I had no compunction in the matter; had I not proved that it could be done?

"I know you come for me!" jeered Skookum. "What I tell you, eh? Big fool to try!" and his raucous laughter rang out as if he had a great joke.

My temper flamed and I was tempted to strike him then and there, but controlled myself in time as I remembered I was in urgent need of his help. "Skookum," I said, suddenly thinking of a sure way to win his services, "you think you're the best man on river in Lillooet Country?" It was a challenge rather than an

announcement, and I saw him take it as such. "I'm a good man too—I'll race you with a raft down the river. You win, I pay you a hundred dollars; you lose, you help me finish the job at good wages."

IT took him a minute or two to assimilate this audacity of mine, but when finally it did penetrate, nothing could have held him back. The race was on—a hundred braves from the reservation had come on their cayuses to see us off and follow along the banks; a dozen or so whites, mostly very skeptical as to my chances of winning, were my support.

The river was lower than ever—more snags and dangerous places than usual; but nevertheless I figured my chances of winning better than Skookum's, who had not been on the river for some time, and as almost every day it shifted its ballast of snags and cantankerous currents and eddies, I, having been on the job every day, was in a better position to know where and how to avoid these conditions—to my advantage.

At last we got away—side by side our rafts raced at express-train speed down the boiling river. The first bend swept into view, the most dangerous of all—worse than a horseshoe. It practically turned at right angles, or made a well defined Z. I was on the inside, the worst position possible. Skookum, instead of trying to keep his raft as far out-stream as possible, suddenly started to lever himself towards me, using his long sweep with powerful strokes. The rafts touched. I shouted to him to keep away, but he gave no heed—he was deliberately trying to force me into the jam—get me hung up.

There was no avoiding it, but I was ready and had contrived so that when I struck, it was head on, so that the impact catapulted me out-stream well into the full force of the current. As I passed Skookum slowly scraping along the barrier, a look of apprehension came to his usually passive face—he must realize now that he was not dealing with a novice at the game.

My strategy had won me a lead of two lengths, and we both knew that the raft that reached the cañon first was practically sure to win. I kept my advantage, steering in the swiftest current. Skookum behind worked his sweep persistently, and in spite of all I could do, he slowly overtook me. Again we were racing side by

side. I had slightly the best position; the current was stronger, and with my aid I saw I was forging ahead again. I glanced at Skookum; he looked all in, having worked with might and main since we took off.

I had no time to watch him further and was adding mightily to my advantage,—had just about cleared him altogether,—when I felt my raft suddenly veering toward the shore. Too late I saw what had happened. Stealing quickly to the front of his raft ere I had passed him to certain victory, he had reached over with his long pole and with a quick powerful shove had put me out of the race.

A MINUTE later I grounded on the rocky shore, while he shot into the cañon with a screech of exultation ringing even above the noise of the river. Seething and wild with anger, I jumped into the water waist deep and exerted all my energy to release my raft. As I worked I promised to give Skookum the greatest beating of his life. I might have lost the race, but he would pay dearly for his short-lived victory. It was some time before I got under way again—and I was in a fitting mood to run the cañon! All the devils themselves couldn't hold me up now.

Midway, towering high above the raging current of the cañon is a gigantic rock that splits the stream in two. Woe to the voyager who piled into such a formidable barrier! And behind the rock was a powerful back-current that could hold within its tentacles the largest raft. I avoided this double danger successfully and was flashing past on my way, when something caught my eyes—I looked. There was Skookum held fast, a prisoner in this titanic whirlpool. He must have been dizzy and sick from the twirling he was getting, for he sat in the center of his raft, his head bent in his hands.

I had no trouble the rest of the way. We waited hours for Skookum to appear—so crestfallen and utterly dejected was he that I postponed the beating indefinitely. He assisted me to finish the rest of the job and we had little or no trouble after that. Seemingly the river god, after doing his best to be rid of us, had softened his roughened waters somewhat and permitted me to use him to my own ends.

The contract completed, I took the first train to town, there to greet my wife—and my newly arrived son.

Partly discern a thing and wonder about the rest, and it sticks in your mind for years.

**Who
Was
the**



Red-Headed Man?

By **W. Payne**

PERHAPS the red-headed man himself or some reader who knew him, will come forward and explain matters and so solve a mystery which has puzzled me for many years.

One afternoon in 1908, I was dismounting from a horse outside my warehouse in Florianopolis, southern Brazil, when a disreputable looking beachcomber accosted me in Portuguese:

"Please give me a tostao, sir—I haven't eaten since yesterday."

He was obviously a European, barefoot, wearing a dirty cotton singlet and khaki trousers held up by a string and with no hat in that broiling sun. He didn't need much head-covering, however, for nature had already covered him with the thickest thatch of red hair I ever saw.

Handing the coin to the man—who muttered "*brigadol*!" and went off to get himself a caixassa (sugar cane brandy) I supposed—I turned and went into the warehouse.

Inside, everything was hustle and hurry. A steamer lay out in the bay, and material consigned to us was being lightered off and brought to the pier outside the ware-

house, where it was unloaded onto small trucks and pushed by hand along rails into the building, to an inside gang.

I was engaged in helping to build the waterworks at Florianopolis, capital city of the State of Santa Catharina, Brazil. We were on a pretty strenuous time contract, which allowed for very little delay and work was being pushed on rapidly.

Every day, after that first one, I would meet that red-headed loafer somewhere. Always his refrain was the same—he hadn't eaten since the day before, though I gave him something every day. It got to be a custom with me, as soon as I saw him, to feel for a coin and pitch it to him as I rode past.

One day we received a cable: a ship-load of material, for which we were ready, had been lost at sea. We cabled a repeat order and perforce had to sit back and await its arrival. By the time the ship with the new load of material cast anchor in the bay, our chances of completing the contract within the time limit had begun to look shadowy, so I personally went aboard to try to hurry up the unloading.

Work went along merrily, for the steve-

dore gang, in contrast with our other workmen, were able fellows—except for one man, a big Portuguese half-caste named Manuel. Several times I had to reprimand him sharply for loafing. Each time I checked him he answered back and seemed to be working himself up to a kind of sullen rage. At last, when a sling of cast-iron pipes he had tied, slipped and fell back into the hold, breaking most of them and narrowly missing killing the men down there, I ordered him to get overside into the lighter and go ashore.

Luckily for me, I happened to be standing beside the mast as I spoke, for he reached into a pocket and drew out a razor, which he opened. I grabbed a belaying pin from the rack, and as he sprang for me, I cracked him on the skull and knocked him out. It was some time before he came to, and several minutes after that before he recovered his wits. When he did, however, and recognized me, his face went livid with rage, and I shall never forget the way he cursed me.

AS the cottage we occupied was quite a little distance on the outskirts of the town, I had a small room in the warehouse cleaned and furnished with a bed for use when I stayed late in town or when we worked late at night. The wharf at which the lighters unloaded was right outside the warehouse, while a few yards away, nearer to the town, was an old, abandoned sugar-wharf, whose planking was rotting with disuse and exposure.

One night, two or three weeks after the incident aboard, I had stayed down-town playing cards until two or three in the morning and decided to sleep in the warehouse rather than take the long trip home.

Walking down the side of the Public Gardens, I noticed a figure peering from behind a tree. Some instinct of warning reminded me of Manuel, and I jumped to the middle of the road. The figure also jumped, and I recognized Manuel with an open razor in his hand. Unfortunately I had left my revolver at home when I changed for the evening and was totally unarmed. He was big enough and strong enough to kill me without weapons, so I ran—and he ran after me.

There were no people about at that hour of the night, and the nearest refuge was the warehouse, so at the bottom of the street I turned along the waterfront. There were no lights then and it was

pitch dark, but I could hear the *pad-pad* of his bare feet following me. I stumbled over cases and other things left along the front. Always I could hear the feet padding after me, and they couldn't be far behind. I was desperately winded, but fear helped me along. Fast as I ran, he was evidently gaining on me. There was very little light, but I could make out the outline of the building as I ran past and knew I was nearing the warehouse. The footsteps came nearer. I knew there would be no time to unlock the warehouse door and lock it again after me, and I could already feel that deadly razor.

THEN an idea came into my head; I would run down to the end of the wharf, dive off and try to beat him swimming back. I was a good swimmer, and perhaps he couldn't swim. Lots of these longshoremen couldn't. So, when I got to what I judged to be the right place, I turned to the left and ran down the wharf.

I hadn't gone above ten yards when I realized what had happened. I had turned off a few yards too soon and was running down the rotten sugar wharf. The loose old deck-planks rattled and cracked under my feet, some of them jumping right out of place as I rushed over them. I couldn't turn back. Even then I could hear Manuel's feet at the beginning of the wharf. All I could hope for was that the old planks would hold under my light weight and that I shouldn't fall into one of the numerous holes in the deck.

Then I heard a tremendous crash of breaking planks behind me, followed by yells and howls. I stopped and waited a moment or two, recovering my breath. The howling continued, interspersed with appeals for help and mercy. Evidently the planking had broken through under Manuel's heavier weight, and he was caught somewhere among the piles below.

I went back carefully and found a big hole in the deck where he had crashed through. Kneeling down beside the hole I could see him against the shine of the water. He was caught in a crotch between two piles.

Any resentment I may have had left me and I started considering how I could get him out. Unless I did so, the poor fellow faced a lingering death by drowning as the tide rose. I had no rope, and if I had, doubted whether I had strength enough to haul him up.

I was just wondering whether to go and summon assistance when—out of the nowhere—a commanding voice said, in most perfect English:

"Go down to the end of the wharf and fetch a couple of cargo slings. You'll find them at the back of the lifebuoys."

So amazing was the interruption, and the voice carried such an accent of habitual command that without a word I got to my feet and obeyed. Sure enough, hanging behind the lifebuoys, I found two cargo slings and returned with them.

I could vaguely discern a man's figure kneeling beside the hole and handed him the slings. He knotted them together and lowered them down the hole, and between us we hauled out the now thoroughly subdued Manuel and laid him on the deck of the wharf.

My unknown ran a pair of evidently well-practiced hands over the man's body.

"This man has broken at least two ribs; go to the hospital and fetch a doctor and an ambulance," he said.

I turned to go, and just then the first rays of the rising moon fell on my companion's face.

It was the red-headed beachcomber.

I LET myself into the warehouse and from there phoned to the hospital for an ambulance and hurried back to the wharf, but when I got back, the red-headed man had disappeared, and only the Portuguese lay on the wharf.

In a few minutes an ambulance came and carried Manuel away, but I did not again see the red-headed man.

During the year or more I stayed in Florianopolis, I searched all his old haunts and even offered a small reward to other beachcombers for news, but to no purpose. The man had completely disappeared.

Many years after,—and in traveling in many countries, all thoughts of the red-headed man had disappeared from my mind,—I was standing idly one day in front of Charing Cross station in London.

The time was 1916, and I was on leave from the Australian army in France and wearing its uniform. While glancing idly up and down the Strand wondering where I should go for a drink, a taxicab pulled up at the curb beside me, and a man, obviously a gentleman, put out his head.

"Good morning, Anzac!" he said. "Are you going anywhere in particular?"

"Only for a drink—anywhere."

"Then hop in here and I'll take you somewhere," he said.

The incident didn't surprise me, for at that time all sorts of people were feeling sorry for us Colonials and our loneliness, and were offering us hospitality.

I got in and we drove off to a very nice bar, somewhere off Piccadilly, I fancy, and there we got into conversation.

My host was a most entertaining man, big, rather unusually well dressed, wearing a morning coat and bearing all the earmarks of affluence.

He insisted on paying for all the drinks, and while we drank we chatted. As I see now, it was probably he who directed the conversation, and it was mostly about foreign countries. That he had traveled much was evident, and I don't suppose I shall ever meet a more interesting talker. From time to time his voice seemed to arouse some vague memory—nothing definite, only just an occasional flash. The only definite thing of which it reminded me was of a naval officer. Somehow I couldn't get rid of that idea of the navy, and once I put the question. He replied that he wasn't in the navy, although I recall he didn't say he never had been.

We had sat maybe an hour when the waiter came to tell us it was time to close, so we both started to go, and as we went, he said:

"I should have liked to ask you to dinner with me, but I'm leaving England in a few hours."

THE taxi was still waiting, ticking up the pennies when we came out.

Then, as he opened the door and put his foot on the step, he held out his hand.

"So glad to have met you, again," he said, and as our hands met, I found a paper in my hand. I looked at it and there lay a five-pound note.

"Here! What the devil does this mean? You can't tip me," I said furiously.

Quietly he said:

"That's not a tip. It's not a gift. It's principal returned—plus interest."

As he stepped into the cab, for the first time he took off his hat.

It was the red-headed beachcomber.

Wondering why a man of his type was ever beachcombing in Brazil has kept me awake many hours. I have finally decided he must have been in some section of the British secret service, but if so, what an actor he would have made!



On the Fringe

By

James Richard Finegan

The attempt to "come back" catches the crowd—especially when the fighter is "on the fringe."

THE "fringe" is the jumping-off place of boxers, the last despairing stand of the grizzled veterans of the fistic fraternity. When once a fighter, even if he has been a champion of champions, is said to be "on the fringe," you know that that gladiator of the hempen square is "through." The fringe, in other words, is the end of the boxer's world.

Very few, indeed, have been the come-backs of fighters once they were on the fringe. To my knowledge, at least, there has been but one prominent performer in the manly art of assault and battery who ever came back after years on the fringe. And that is not another story. It is this one!

Perhaps Louisville, Ky., can boast of more beautiful women and thoroughbred horses than it can of champion boxers. But this blue-grass city does boast its fistic colony, where there gallivant many leather-pushers who can throw gloves in a fashion meriting newspaper recognition. That is how I became involved in this story.

As a sports scribe on the *Times*, my regular Monday-night assignment is to cover the bouts at the Jefferson County Armory. Some of the glove-throwers showing there are rated somewhat highly in the South, but for the most part they scarcely are better than what are termed in the fight racket as ham-an'-eggers. The main-go encounters, however, are the ones which boast the better class of fighters. On this Monday night in question two of the best performers in Dixie were scheduled over the twelve-round route. An hour before the initial attraction, for the first time in its fistic history, the Armory was jammed.

WITH the sports scribblers from the opposing sheets, I was seated at the press table at the ringside. The curtain-raiser got under way—one of those wind-mill affairs, furnishing considerable amusement but little fighting. Soon the prelim bouts had been gone through. Then came the semi-wind-up, followed by the intermission.

When came time for the headline attraction, the first of the fighters climbed through the ropes into the ring, but his opponent was not to be seen. Within fifteen minutes shouts were heard from the spectators clamoring for the second thumper. Those at the press table faced one another with knowing looks. In our opinions the second battler had acquired frigid pedal extremities and had failed to appear for his bout. Soon the stamping and the whistling and the shouting reached unbearable heights—suddenly dropping off into nothing when the announcer stepped to the center of the ring.

"One-punch McTague," the announcer shouted, "has failed to put in his appearance. The management regrets this state of affairs and requests me to announce that the spectators will have their money refunded by displaying their ticket-stubs at the booth on the way out."

"We don't want our money," came the chorus of shouts; "we want a fight!"

"Yeah," shouted a spectator in the first row, "get somebody else to mess mugs with that palooka!"

"Perhaps you'd like to do it yourself?" retorted the announcer.

The remark shut up the talkative fan, while the others enjoyed a good laugh at his expense.

Then a voice—grim, determined—floated through the smoke-laden air:

"I'll fight him!"

EVERY eye turned as one to the back row of the balcony—as one of the men seated there rose and came forward. Tim Freville of the *Herald-Post* glanced toward me and remarked:

"A piece of the fringe."

And he did look the part. A cap, torn, dirty, oily, hung on the right side of his sandy hair; his coat, tattered at its bottom, reflected a sheen from its shiny elbows; his pants, baggy at the knees, failed to reach his worn shoes by inches.

Down the aisle he came. With jeers to the right of him, and cheers to the left of him, he was unmoved. Into the ring he climbed—spoke to the announcer, who made as if to eject him.

"Let him fight!" rose the cry, echoed and re-echoed throughout the structure.

The promoter, fighter and referee entered a midring conference, the result of which was that permission was granted for the bout to go on. In my opinion, the

promoter was thinking of the gate-receipts, and the fighter of a set-up.

THE unknown walked to a far corner and began to disrobe. When he had doffed his coat and shirt, a murmur of amazement rippled through the spectators. Brawny muscles fairly bulged beneath his skin! A roar of approval went up when the fringe fighter had torn off his trousers just above the knees to fashion a pair of impromptu tights, for he had the sturdiest legs yet seen in a Louisville ring. The bloodthirsty fans wet their lips; perhaps they yet would get a fight!

The referee beckoned the two scrappers to the middle of the ring, where he gave the usual instructions; then the pair returned to their respective corners. The gong sounded, and Jacky Payne, a hard-clouting boxer, rushed out to meet the stranger. But the newcomer, using marvelous footwork, nimbly stepped aside, hooking a crushing right to Payne's jaw as he passed. Payne turned and was after the unknown, who boxed cautiously, Payne finally doing likewise. Little action marked the remainder of that initial chukker, for both thumpers were feeling each other out when the round terminated.

The newcomer's seconds whispered advice into the ear of their fighter when he returned to his corner. He nodded absently, paying them no attention whatever. All of his glances, seemingly worried, were directed toward the press box.

"Ye gods!" came a cry from a member of the boxing commission who was at the table with the scribes. "That's Jimmy McVey, a fighter who once floored Benny Leonard—and once was rated the logical contender for the lightweight throne!"

Of course all the scribblers stared at the commissioner, then at the fighter. Soon the realization dawned upon us all that it was no other than the one and only Jimmy McVey seated on the stool in the far corner. For there never has been, nor will there ever be, a fighter with the physique, the science, that was McVey's. At this juncture the gong punctured our thoughts..

WITH a crafty movement akin to that of a feline, McVey sprang from his corner and connected with punishing right and left blows to his opponent's body before the latter scarcely had up his guard. Immeasurably surprised, Payne retreated,

On the Fringe

covering up like a sleeper on a cold night. But McVey was after him. With a crushing right to the body, followed by a powerful left to the point of the jaw, Payne crumpled like the walls of Jericho and sprawled, seemingly lifeless, on the blood-spattered, resin-stained canvas.

With eyes bright with the thrill of victory, McVey stood leaning against the hemp, in a neutral corner, while cheer after cheer mounted heavenward, punctuated with the name of the fighter who once was one of the best in the game. A fighter from the fringe had come back!

Counted out, Payne was assisted to his corner by McVey, who then stumbled through the ropes into the press-box, where we swarmed about him, eager for the best story that had "broke" in Louisville in months.

Reluctantly, McVey began to talk.

"Following my first and only defeat in the ring, I vowed never to return, promising my wife I would enter some business with my ring earnings as capital. This I did. But the business failed to click, and within a few years I was a bankrupt. For months I roamed the streets seeking work, but could find none. My wife and one of the kids took sick, and a surgeon ordered an immediate operation for my wife. Finally I found work digging ditches, which kept me in trim, but didn't provide enough funds to defray the expense of the operation.

"Came, then, the thought of boxing. The local promoters would not book me. I had given them an assumed name, for I did not want my wife to find I had broken my vow, even for a night. Had I told the promoters that I was Jimmy McVey, I'm sure I would have been given a fight.

"Tonight the old lure of the ring circulated through my blood, and I came to the bouts in the hope of getting just such a lucky break as I did. I won. But what's more important, I received a hundred dollars as my share of the purse. That will pay for my wife's operation.

"But I'm through with the ring, although I appreciate all it has done for me. I'm going back home now, boys, to my wife. You will all do me a great favor by not printing my real name in your stories."

We didn't run his story at all. But we often, at the Monday night fights, talk of how the fringe fighter came back—how the ring lost a great fighter; how the world gained a fine citizen!

Just a Little Careful

SOME time ago another prospector, Al Wright, and I were working a silver claim down in the Arizona country. Our location was in the foothills of the Bradshaws; about half way between Phoenix and Prescott. We did our trading at a stage station—consisting of a store and a stable—some ten miles away.

We had started a tunnel into the side of the hill, but after driving it thirty or forty feet decided to sink a shaft on the ledge. We were pretty well fixed up for prospectors. Had a wall tent with a bunk on either side. Just in front of the tent we had put up a shed beneath which we did our cooking.

It was an isolated and desolate region. Sparse vegetation and very little water, but lots of Gila monsters, rattle-snakes and skunks. Those pesky varmints were the bane of our lives.

Well, this day Al and I went to the station for a supply of grub. On the way out we made record time as Chango, our pack burro, was in high spirits and kept up a hot pace. But on the return trip—I wonder did any of you readers ever drive a burro with a topheavy pack down a rough mountain trail? A wise old burro who knew just how and when to throw his load? If you haven't, my advice is: don't try it—except you have a grudge against yourself.

Chango, a big, black animal, was just a wily old critter. We had not gone far on our way back to camp before he plainly showed that he disapproved of his load, the way it was packed or something. Anyhow, as soon as we struck the down grade, he made straight for a projecting boulder



A strange combination of creatures and circumstances, mingled in the dark, brought about this amusing experience.

By
**Louis Clair
Miller**

and despite our yells got a hitch on that rock, and off went his load. Then with one ear cocked forward and the other back he looked at us and as much as said: "I'll show you what I can do."

He certainly did it all right, not only dumped his load but smashed a quart bottle we had stuck in the pack as well. That bottle, or rather its contents, was to be used only in case of snake-bites, or when we were not feeling just right.

And so that ornery beast kept up his stunts all the way back to camp.

AL was fighting mad over the loss of the bottle, and I was so tired that it was an effort to carry the fifty-pound sack of flour back into the tunnel where we kept our grub.

The sky was leaden and the atmosphere heavy as though it was preparing to rain. So nature's gloom and our own weariness caused us to turn in early, and we were soon sound asleep.

Sometime during the night I was awakened, or it would be more accurate to say, startled out of my sleep. I was rubbing my eyes and wondering what it was, or what had happened, when I heard Al raise up on his elbow. He too had been suddenly awakened.

The night was intensely dark, a dense, impenetrable darkness. As it was impossible to see I strained to hear what it was that woke us up. And there came from just in front of the tent a strange, uncanny sound. *Tap, tap, tap*, then a pause.

Then again *tap, tap, tap*. And so it continued. There was a metallic ring in the tapping. I could not make out what in the world it was.

Then I heard Al slip out of his bunk, put on his shoes and cautiously feel his way out of the tent, the flaps of which were tied back.

I waited to see what he would find. We hadn't spoken a word—I don't know why, except everything was so spooky.

When Al returned I noticed that he was breathing heavily, and I was startled when he said to me in low tense tones, "You had better get up."

And I was even more bewildered when I heard him reach under his pillow. I knew he was getting his six-shooter. So I slipped on my shoes, and wondering what it was all about, followed him out of the tent.

It was so dark I had to keep my hand on his shoulder to know where he was. We paused beneath the shed and listened. There it was just ahead of us—that *tap, tap*—and more! Something white, that seemed to be going through peculiar antics! It would glide along a ways and then twist and turn in a sinuous sort of way—always accompanied by that *tap, tap*.

My eyes were fixed upon it and I was certainly in a quandary when Al clutched me by the arm and twisted me partly around. And then the blood in my veins seemed to have suddenly turned to ice. I'm sure every hair on my head stood straight up. Because just in front of us, apparently

about twenty feet away, was another object, ghostly white in the dense darkness.

There was not a sound, except that tapping, not a breath of air—the stillness was oppressive.

That white object with its arms high above its head seemed to be in the air, a couple of feet from the ground. I tried to figure out what it could be but my head wouldn't work.

Slowly the apparition moved toward us with outstretched arms.

Al, who was now shaking like a leaf, pressed the six-shooter into my hand.

I FELT a little safer when my fingers closed on the handle of that gun. But should I shoot, and what was I shooting at, were the questions in my mind. And there was that other white thing over there with its eerie *tap, tap, tap!*

I knew I could hit either object. Darkness didn't make any difference, as I always shot from my hip. But I didn't like to shoot until I knew what I was shooting at. And yet the thing kept drawing closer and reaching out its arms toward us. And that other white thing with its uncanny tapping was coming our way too.

I didn't know just what to do but had about made up my mind to cut loose with the .45 when Al again clutched me by the arm, and I knew from his movement what he meant. So we quietly went back into the tent but did not utter a word—we were too mystified to talk. We just wanted to get a hold on ourselves, and await developments.

We had only a minute or so to wait, and then there it was, that tall white thing standing right in the doorway. And, Great Scott—its white arms seemed to be reaching into the tent after us!

No living human being could stand this longer! So I cocked the gun and in justifi-

cation for what I was about to do spoke up. "Look sharp, Al, for I'm going to smoke it up."

With this I raised the six-shooter, but as quickly lowered it. Because there came from that white specter the loudest *hee-haw—hee-haw!* I ever heard in my life.

"It's old Chango!" Al cried in relief.

AL lit a candle, and sure enough there was Chango looking at us with a twinkle in his eye which plainly meant: "Gosh! I've had a good feed."

We saw at a glance what had happened. That durned old burro had gone into the tunnel and found that sack of flour. And what he didn't eat of it he'd spilled all over his front from his long ears clear to his knees.

We shoosed him away, but there was that other thing. . . . Searching, we found it—a very large skunk. And the second mystery was cleared up.

That night for supper we had opened a can of corn. Instead of cutting around I just made several cuts to the center and pressed the prongs down into the can. That skunk came along and in his eagerness to get the few grains of corn that were left in the bottom had jammed his head down into it and of course was held there by the sharp prongs of tin. So, not being able to see, he kept tapping the ground with the can until he hit some obstacle or lost his balance; then over he would go, and the broad white stripe down his back was all we could see in the dark.

Well, I blazed away, and there was one skunk less. Then we went back to bed, but I put in the rest of the night bewailing the loss of the sack of flour. Al couldn't sleep because of his eagerness to convince me that he was not scared, or as he put it: "I wasn't the least bit scared; I was just a little careful."

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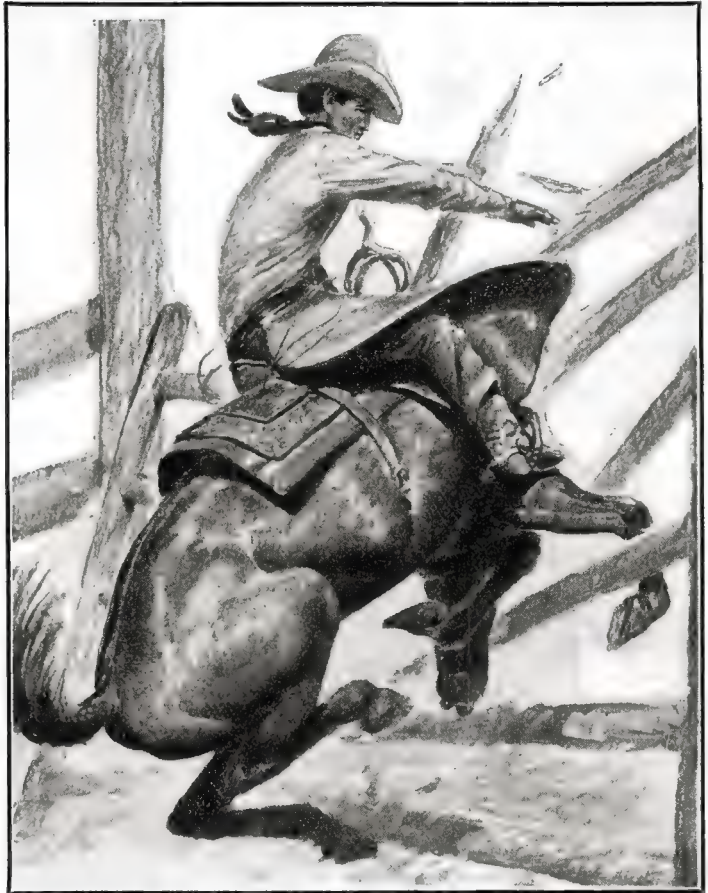
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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912

OF THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1927.
State of Illinois, } ss.
County of Cook, }

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:
Publisher, The Consolidated Magazines Corporation.....
.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Editor, Edwin Balmer.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Managing Editor, None.
Business Manager, Charles M. Richter.....
.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)
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Charles M. Richter.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of the stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1927.

[Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.,
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